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**Working with and between Citizens and a Neo-patrimonial
Government: How Has an NGO's Contextualised Rights-based
Approach Influenced Cambodians' Agency in Fulfilling their Rights to
Development?**

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Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Education

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October 2014

I hereby declare that this thesis has not been and will not be, submitted in whole or in part to another University for the award of any other degree.

Signature_____

University of Sussex

Doctor of Education

Working with and between Citizens and a Neo-patrimonial Government:
How Has an NGO's Contextualised Rights-based Approach Influenced Cambodians'
Agency in Fulfilling their Rights to Development?

Summary

Mainly from the perspective of transformative learning (TL), the thesis explores how the rights-based approach (RBA) by a Cambodian NGO has influenced rural citizens' agency in fulfilling their rights to development and, consequently, has brought about social change. The study was conducted in particular contexts where for the last decade there have been decentralisation reforms and land grabbing, both of which have come into existence as a result of the conjunction of neo-patrimonialism (as a patronage-based practice by the Cambodian government) and such global forces as the influences of aid donors and the increase in global resource demands. The literature indicates that RBA as a western-conceptualised and confrontational approach is not likely to work, especially in relation to the often authoritarian governments of developing countries. Hence, this study has chosen a Cambodian NGO—which has modified RBA to fit the rural context of Cambodia—as a case, so as to explore the potential and limits of RBA in a highly repressive and complex context.

In order to explore the context-specific yet multi-scalar phenomenon of the agency and structure relationship, I utilised a grounded theory ethnographic study

inspired by critical realism and employed the expanded framework of the TL theory, further complemented by the Freirean approach and Gramscian thought. Furthermore, in order to delve into how the exercise of citizens' agency is constrained by structures, this study also situates TL's rather active view of agency in the critical realist's moderate view of agency.

This thesis argues that the Cambodian NGO, by working closely with government, has made full use of and further widened the democratic spaces made available through decentralisation, in order to create spaces conducive to TL, and has harnessed its multi-faceted and process-oriented rights-based empowerment approach in order to enhance citizens' agency to claim their rights. However, the thesis critiques the fact that the NGO has not enabled citizens to become aware of and to contend against the deep-seated practice of neo-patrimonialism that is hidden behind the democratic façade of the decentralisation process and that has engendered land grabbing, with the result that the NGO has been promoting 'thin' rights. Finally this study reveals the possibilities of TL through RBA in the highly oppressive and resource-scarce context of rural Cambodia, yet casts doubt on its replicability as it appears to demand the mobilisation of a number of enabling factors in order for TL to occur within such a context.

Acknowledgements

In Cambodia my sincere gratitude goes to Life with Dignity, the sample NGO, which accepted my research, and its staff and project participants who made their time available for my inquiry. I am also indebted to the research assistants for their support. I would also like to thank my friends in Cambodia who gave me their time and care during the difficult times of my fieldwork.

In the UK, my thanks go to Mario Novelli, my main supervisor, who has believed in me, provided me with encouragement, and challenged me to go beyond my horizons, throughout the thesis research. I am also grateful to Ricardo Sabates, my second supervisor, whose advice was instrumental in the formulation of my initial literature review and who has provided me with continuous support. I am also obliged to Kattie Lussier for her valuable advice on grounded theory, and Penny Ann McKeon for her thorough proofreading.

In Japan and elsewhere I would like to thank my family and friends who have tolerated my limited availability. I am particularly grateful to my wife, Shiho, and my daughters, Haruka and Hanna, who have supported me and borne my often divided attention between family, the doctoral work, and my job for several years now. Finally, I dedicate this thesis to God who has given me the strength to complete it.

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List of Abbreviation

CBO	Community-based Organisation
CC	Commune Council
CEF	Community Empowerment Facilitator
CEO	Community Empowerment Officer
CPP	Cambodian People's Party
CP Rights	Civil and Political Rights
CSF	Commune Sangkat Fund
DO	District Office
DV	Domestic Violence
ELC	Economic Land Concession
ESC Rights	Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
FFS	Farmer Field School
GALO	Gender and Advocacy Liaison Officer
GT	Grounded Theory
LWD	Life with Dignity
LWF	Lutheran World Federation
NGO	Non-governmental Organisation
PP	Project Participants
PRA	Participatory Rural Appraisal
RBA	Rights-based Approach
SDA	Service-delivery Approach
SLC	Social Land Concession
TL	Transformative Learning
VDC	Village Development Committee
VPP	Village Partnership Project

Chapter 1: Introduction

The rights-based approach (RBA) has emerged in the arena of international development since the middle of the 1990s, due to the convergence of different socio-historical strands during that period (Cornwall & Nyamu-Musembi, 2004). As a result, it has become one of the key development discourses. In order to fulfil a wide spectrum of human rights, RBA aims to empower the community of rights-holders (namely, citizens) to claim their rights from duty-bearers (in many cases, government), whilst it aims to support, develop and lobby duty-bearers to be more responsive and accountable to such demands from citizens (Cornwall & Nyamu-Musembi, 2004).

This study will examine a development non-governmental organisation's (NGO) rights-based intervention for rural citizens in Cambodia from the perspective of adult learning. RBA is fundamentally a political process, as it deals with governance and rights issues (Macpherson, 2009). Therefore, it is quite challenging for Cambodians to claim their rights from their authoritarian government against the hierarchical and conservative social norms. The genealogy of RBA reveals that it was conceptualised in the West (Cornwall & Nyamu-Musembi, 2004). This western-conceptualised approach, which assumes the 'universal' concept of human rights (often manifested as aggressive and confrontational toward duty-bearers in developing countries) and the uniform exercise of people's agency (their capacities to act independently and autonomously), is not likely to work in certain contexts, as evidenced by the implementation difficulties experienced by some international NGOs elsewhere in the world (for example, Plipat, 2005; Tagoe, 2008; Macpherson, 2009). Therefore I suspected that an RBA site would be one where such an approach was likely in one way or another to clash with Cambodia's political, social and cultural forces and hence that a study of such a site would in turn reveal the complexities of enhancing people's agency in claiming rights, thereby illuminating the potential and limitations of RBA.

In fact it seems to be a critical moment in Cambodia, where there have been gross and pervasive violations of development-related human rights for the last decade, for such a study to be conducted. The most prevalent violation is land grabbing, as a complicit act between political elites and domestic and foreign investors, induced not only by a global demand for land but also by pressure from the World Bank with its neo-liberal policies. On the other hand, decentralisation reforms in Cambodia through

installing commune councils (CCs) as frontline government rural machinery since 2002 have brought subtle shifts in the relationship between people's agency and the oppressive structure of local government (Öjendal & Sedara, 2006). The decentralisation process "has sparked agency, and the structural impediments to individual actions are less totalitarian and less punishing," although there still remain a "patronage structure, explicit and implicit semi-authoritarianism and the exercise of patriarchal power exercise" (Öjendal & Sedara, 2006, pp. 525-526). Hence on the one hand more difficult contexts have emerged for people to claim rights, whilst on the other, the window of opportunity for such acts has seemingly been opened up. I undertook this study in this particular spatio-temporal horizon where various forces have converged in a complex manner.

RBA essentially aims at transforming people's perspectives on claiming their rights. This adult learning process is known as transformative learning (TL) (Cranton, 2006; Mezirow, 2009). Existing TL research indicates less research in non-formal education settings, within which development NGOs' interventions fall, and little research in non-western contexts (Taylor, 2007; Taylor & Snyder, 2012).

In the arena of adult learning, there is a lack of research that addresses the interplay between the personal and the social (Billett, 2009). TL research is no exception to this, and several authors (for instance, Brookfield, 2000; Gunnlaugson, 2008; Cranton & Taylor, 2012; Taylor & Snyder, 2012) maintain that a more accentuated and rigorous engagement between the personal and the social needs to be done in empirical research. In particular, among the small amount of research on TL in non-western contexts, there is even less research that analyses cultural influences on TL (Taylor & Snyder, 2012). In addition, Mezirow (2000), the inventor of the TL theory, suggests a variety of preconditions—such as safety, economic security and emotional intelligence—for TL to occur, which at least some people in developed countries can afford. In contrast, poverty-stricken and post-conflict Cambodians face daily a variety of socio-political, physical-material and emotional-psychological impediments (rather than preconditions), which seem to make TL unaffordable for them.

Therefore, by locating TL as the main theoretical framework, this study will attempt to inquire: **How and in what ways has the intervention of a rights-based development NGO in Cambodia influenced people's agency in fulfilling their rights to development and how have political, economic, social and cultural**

contexts influenced people's learning in their move towards fulfilling their rights?

In order to give tentative answers to this central research question I will attempt to answer the following sub-set research questions:

- How has a sample NGO's intervention shortened the mental distance between its project participants (PPs) and local government (particularly CCs) as well as between them and land-grabbing companies?
- How and in what ways has a sample NGO's intervention influenced the agency of its PPs in fulfilling their rights?
- How have political, economic, social and cultural contexts influenced the PPs' learning in their move towards fulfilling their rights?

As mentioned, a western-conceptualised RBA is not likely to work in certain contexts. Therefore, RBA needs to be contextualised to fit in particular local contexts. Hence, this study has chosen a sample development NGO that implements such a contextualised RBA in Cambodia. One of the expected results of this research is to provide unique insights for academia as well as for practitioners in terms of how a localised rights-based intervention, which has been *worked out on the ground*, enhances people's agency in fulfilling their rights as the antithesis to the western-conceptualised RBA, which is often imposed by Northern development organisations or donors on their Southern partners (for example, Tagoe, 2008; Macpherson, 2009). Specifically, this thesis will argue that rather than taking a confrontational approach to government, which is often connoted in the western-conceptualised form of RBA, this sample NGO has been working closely with government, thereby further widening the democratic spaces made available through decentralisation. Moreover, rather than compartmentalising the emerging RBA and the conventional service-delivery approach (SDA) in its programming, this NGO has exercised its ingenuity to utilise its RBA and SDA in a mutually reinforcing manner to serve people's learning as they move toward their rights-based empowerment. The thesis will then discuss how Cambodia's political, economic, social and cultural forces had often influenced people's learning negatively, and the extent to which the above-mentioned enabling factors created by the NGO were able to counteract these.

1.1 Layout of Thesis

The thesis is structured into eight chapters. After this introductory chapter, Chapter two briefly introduces the contextual background of Cambodia.

Chapter three is then devoted to my research journey. I will illustrate how ontological, epistemological, methodological and analytical choices were made during the research by interweaving the various conceptualisations of agency, one of the main theoretical frameworks, with the discussion.

In Chapter four I will first sketch the basic idea of RBA, the substantive field of the study. In the second half of the chapter I will develop a theoretical framework of TL by incorporating its expanding theoretical framework—in order to bring about a theoretical fit into this study—and by supplementing it with the approaches inspired by Paulo Freire and Antonio Gramsci, so as to explore the multi-scalar nature of the agency and structure relationship.

The fifth, sixth and seventh chapters will all be devoted to the analysis of the data and the discussion of the findings. Chapter five will look at how the sample NGO has attempted to enable people to claim their rights to development in the context of the dynamic interplay between people's agency and the decentralised governance structure. Chapter six will also examine how the sample NGO has been building people's confidence and capacities in fulfilling their rights to development particularly by reinventing its SDA and through efficacious rights awareness-raising. Chapter seven will discuss the process in which the sample NGO has influenced people's agency in dealing with land grabbing in the context of the complex interplay between their agency and the powerful structure where the interests of political elites and the economically powerful, the global demand for lands, and the agenda of the neo-liberal multinational donor converged.

Finally, Chapter eight will conclude this thesis by drawing together the major findings. In addition, I will assess the methodological, theoretical (that is, agency and TL) and practical (namely, RBA) contributions of this study.

Chapter 2: Socio-cultural, Political and Economic Context

This chapter will briefly present the basic contextual background of Cambodia to lay the groundwork for the subsequent chapters. However, I will incorporate detailed contextual background into pertinent analytical chapters for the natural flow of analysis and discussion.

2.1 Patronage and Neo-patrimonialism

Cambodian society is characterised by social hierarchies and more specifically patronage (O'Leary & Meas, 2001; O'Leary, 2006; Pak et al., 2007; Knowles, 2009). From the ontological, cosmological and worldview perspectives, patronage in Cambodia has its historical roots in prominent leaders having absolute power and establishing their own dynasties as the model of ruling (Pak et al., 2007). Moreover, such religious and traditional values as the Hindu notion of god-kings with omnipotent powers, the Buddhist belief in *karma*¹, in which the fatalism of the poor necessitates the charity of the rich, and the Buddhist notion also of the benevolence of leaders, have all underpinned and shaped the practice of patronage (Pak et al., 2007).

Whilst kinship and patronage within a village have remained the basic form of material and affectionate reciprocity, patronage became more extensive, impersonal and asymmetrical during the French colonial era and during the conflicts (Pak et al., 2007). In particular, the brutal, exploitative and systematic rule of French colonisation, the Khmer Rouge's Democratic Kampuchea and the externally-controlled socialist People's Republic of Kampuchea brought such changes to the Cambodian patronage (Pak et al., 2007). The fear element caused by such oppressive and exploitive contexts further "rationalises the need for security and protection that a patron... provides" (Pak et al., 2007, p. 53). It was especially the inability of village-level patronage to provide protection and needs during the conflicts that led people to look for patrons outside their villages (Pak et al., 2007).

This led to the emergence of neo-patrimonialism, in which the government institutions, more specifically their heads and members, tend to prioritise their resource

¹ "The sum of a person's actions in one of his successive states of existence, regarded as determining his fate in the next" according to the Oxford English Dictionary (Oxford University Press, 2013).

allocations and devise or bend their policies according to personal patronage networks (Öjendal & Sedara, 2006; Pak et al., 2007). More precisely, neo-patrimonialism is the condition where the informal practice of patronage and the formal rational-legal practice of modern bureaucracy coexist in order for government leaders to maximise their personal gains, whether these are power, wealth or votes (Van de Walle, 2001). Such patronage-based networks and rent-seeking are pervasive at all levels of government bureaucracies starting from the top. Finally, rather than reforming the ineffective or corruptive government's social-service delivery policies and programmes, which derive from neo-patrimonialism, the political elites and political parties tend to utilise charity for the poor in order to gain votes and political legitimacy (Pak et al., 2007; Craig & Pak, 2011).

2.2. Legacy of Conflict

O'Leary and Meas (2001) point out that years of conflict have fostered passivity and a lack of initiative, and broken down basic human relationships. Similarly, Volkan (2009) points out a shared sense of inability to be assertive as a societal trauma in post-conflict societies. Leng and Pearson (2006) and Volkan (2009) find that even years after conflicts, such psychological impacts of conflicts remain embedded in the society and are transferred through inter-generational transmission.

Particularly with regard to a lack of initiative, Knowles (2009) and Pearson (2011) comment that a general culture of fear, together with Asian 'face-saving' tendencies, has resulted in the attitude of risk aversion. Therefore, for their own safety, Cambodians normally avoid challenging those in authority (O'Leary & Meas, 2001; Pearson, 2011).

With regard to shattered human relationships, there is the argument that social cohesion in villages had been weak even before the conflicts, being evident only during crisis times (Centre for Advanced Study, 2006). In addition, the vertical patronage system mentioned above encouraged few horizontal relationships with other villagers (Centre for Advanced Study, 2006). However, such weak cohesion was drastically and further atomised during the Khmer Rouge regime when people were forced to work in de facto labour camps and to spy on and betray each other even including family members. Pearson (2011) elaborates the analysis:

The cultural need to suppress anything that might cause disharmony, combined with uncertainty about whom it might be safe to talk to, leaves many people feeling alone with their painful histories, which in turn adds to the general level of mistrust in society. (p. 34).

On the other hand, a counterview to this weak social cohesion (Centre for Advanced Study, 2006) has emerged. This view maintains that the emergence of Buddhist temple associations and natural resource management groups in villages indicate growing social cohesion (Centre for Advanced Study, 2006).

Cambodia, a post-conflict country, is still considered one of the poorest states in Southeast Asia despite its steady economic growth. Its Gross National Income (GNI) per capita is US \$830 and 23% of its population live below the poverty line of US \$1.25 per day (UNICEF, 2013). About 50% of the central government budget still comes from donor aid (US Department of State, 2013). In terms of population distribution and the composition of industry, Cambodia is predominantly rural-based: 80% of its population lives in rural areas (UNICEF, 2013) and the agricultural sector employs 56% of the population, whilst the (largely garment) industry sector employs 17% (UNdata, 2013).

Mainly due to the impacts of several decades of conflict and turmoil, Cambodia's education system has been far from adequate. Moreover, in a manner reminiscent of neo-patrimonialism, the political leaders have historically given priority to the quantitative expansion of school facilities, as this visibly consolidates their political legitimacy, in comparison with the qualitative improvement of education (Ayres, 2000b; Ayres, 2000a). Furthermore, teacher-centred and top-down pedagogical practices—where pupils' 'voices' are rarely valued—have been utilised in accordance with Cambodia's hierarchical norms, and particularly, memorisation rather than critical thinking has been emphasised (O'Leary & Meas, 2001).

2.3 Cambodia's Decentralisation Reforms

There is a five-tier administration system in Cambodia: national, provincial, district, commune and village. The focus of Cambodia's decentralisation reforms has been at the commune level. Whilst the governors of provinces and districts are appointed by the central government, commune councillors are elected, and so far four commune elections have been held since 2002, in all of which the Cambodian People's Party (CPP) dominated. This domination had penetrated village politics, as commune

councils (CCs) appoint village leaders, deputy village leaders, and village secretaries, who now constitute the three key members of Village Development Committees (VDCs) due to the recent government policy change². The size of each CC is five to eleven members, depending on the population size of the commune (Spyckerelle & Morrison, 2007).

The typical profiles of councillors are men over 40 years old with limited formal education, who are influential members of political parties (Blunt & Turner, 2005; Plummer & Tritt, 2012). In line with the Cambodian social norms discussed thus far, they tend to be conservative in their thinking, “particularly in relation to the observation of strict hierarchies of authority...and the importance of uncertainty avoidance” (Blunt & Turner, 2005, p. 84). CCs have a dual role as representatives of communes chosen through an election and as agents of the central government—namely, the CPP (Plummer & Tritt, 2012). The primary role of a CC is to prioritise and implement local development projects by utilising the Commune Sangkat³ Fund (CSF), although they manage some administrative tasks such as issuing marriage certificates and resolving local and domestic disputes (Plummer & Tritt, 2012). However, they are excluded from dealing with issues and conflicts related to natural resources—namely, forests and land (Blunt & Turner, 2005; Heng et al., 2011; Plummer & Tritt, 2012).

2.4 Conclusion

This chapter has provided a brief introduction to the socio-cultural, political and economic context of Cambodia and particularly depicted the highly repressive and resource-scarce nature of the context. Cambodian society is characterised by social hierarchies, patronage, and neo-patrimonialism. In addition, several decades of conflict have fostered the passive attitude of citizens, further weakened social cohesion, brought about immense poverty, and contributed to inadequate education systems. Finally I illustrated Cambodian’s commune-level decentralisation reforms and especially highlighted the CPP’s continued domination in such decentralised governance.

² Prior to this policy change, all the VDC members were elected by villagers.

³ Sangkat is equivalent to a commune in towns and cities.

Chapter 3: Research Journey

3.1 Introduction

This chapter attempts to illustrate the ontological, epistemological, methodological and analytical choices made during the whole research process. Central to this research is an exploration of how people's agency in claiming their rights is exercised in relation to sub-national-, national- and even global-level forces converging in particular spatio-temporal horizons in rural Cambodia. Hence, this research requires an ontological and epistemological positionality as well as methodological and analytical approaches, which encompass such spatio-temporally specific yet multi-scalar natures of the agency-structure relationship. Thus, this chapter will start by explaining my ontological and epistemological journey by highlighting my internal dialogue on the gap between the reality emerging from the research and my original position on ontology and epistemology. There I will interweave the various conceptualisations of agency, one of the main theoretical frameworks, with the discussion. Then I will depict how my consequent ontological and epistemological shift led me to choose a more suitable methodological position. Following that, I will briefly mention how my research has become progressively more focused. Next, I will explain how and why I chose the sample NGO and then how I went about selecting research sites within its operating areas. Subsequently, I will show how specific research methods were strategically employed. Then I will describe the analytic approach and process particularly devised for exploring the micro-macro linkages mentioned above. Finally, I will state how major ethical issues were addressed.

3.2 Ontological and Epistemological Journey

3.2.1 Giddens' View of Agency⁴

The concept of agency in social sciences has received a great deal of attention. Theorists and empiricists have worked on the definitions of the term, its consequences for individuals, and its impacts on societies. Although the Dictionary of the Social Sciences defines agency as "the capacity for autonomous social action" or "the ability of actors to operate independently of determining constraints of social structure"

⁴ For the major part of this section, I draw from Kimura (2013).

(Calhoun, 2002, p. 7), social scientists theorise agency in a variety of ways from their own ontological and epistemological positions.

For example, Greener (2002) and Cleaver (2009) claim that Anthony Giddens' structuration theory provides an optimistic and dynamic view of agency. Giddens (1984) argues that people are reflexive and knowledgeable agents who regularly monitor their actions and structure. Such reflexive and knowledgeable agents draw on structure—which is rules and resources, according to him—in the production and reproduction of their actions; simultaneously, such actions determined by structure will reflexively reinforce structure (Giddens, 1984). He calls such a process “the duality of structure,” in which “the structural properties of social systems are both medium and outcome of the practices they recursively organise” (Giddens, 1984, p. 25). By focusing on the dynamic role of agents in Giddens' structuration theory, Greener (2002) claims that structure “can be relatively easy to overcome by highly reflexive agents” (p. 698).

In contrast to this dynamic interpretation of Giddens' view of agency, Sudo (1997) considers Giddens' view of agency as more akin to that of the structuralist. He argues that if a subject cannot foresee that he would realise his intention due to the unpredictable nature of the world, he would rather exercise agency under or according to the structure that ensures the likelihood of realising the intention. To put it differently, structure defines the agency of a subject and such agency indeed ends up reproducing structure. Therefore, in this perspective, overcoming structure is not an easy task.

The Society for the Promotion of Area Resource Centres (SPARC), a local NGO in India, has been assisting the local social movement of slum and pavement dwellers in their accommodating (rather than confrontational) negotiations with Indian government institutions, knowing that it is what those people (particularly women) prefer and consider workable (Roy, 2009). The case of SPARC emulates Giddens' view of agency. Rather than claiming rights in a direct manner, those people collectively demonstrate development alternatives—such as their own designs for toilets and model houses for resettlement housing—to government institutions (Mitlin, 2006). In so doing, whilst they forge collaborative relationships with government institutions, they still collectively influence government policies for their benefit. Faced with forced evictions led by government, those pavement-dwelling women formulated their own defensive strategies reminiscent of James Scott's (1985) “Weapons of the Weak,” subordinate classes' quiet and daily resistance to powerholders through their “hidden

scripts”—discourses only circulated among subordinate class circles, such as gossips and gestures, and less confrontational physical acts such as boycott and petty theft:

Rather than confronting the police, they decided to outwit them. When the police next came, the women offered to take down their dwellings. They dismantled their shacks and neatly stacked their belongings and building materials on the pavement. This left only rubbish on the site where their shacks had stood, which they invited the police to take away. The police were willing to do this, as they could then go back and report that the dwellings had been dismantled. Once the police had left, the women replaced their dwellings. As a result, they kept their material possessions, they and their families were not traumatized by the experience, and the police began to see that they could negotiate with the poor. (Patel & Mitlin, 2009, p. 115).

In the Cambodian rural context, the decentralisation reform through installing commune councils (CCs) as frontline government rural machinery since 2002 has brought subtle yet steady shifts in the relationship between people’s agency and oppressive governance structure (Öjendal & Sedara, 2006; Öjendal & Sedara, 2011). From my preliminary investigation prior to the main fieldwork, I understood that rather than taking a confrontational stance with local government, Life with Dignity (LWD), a sample NGO, takes a more collaborative stance through humble engagement and by building local government’s capacity to implement their duties through, for example, the provision of training on the rights-based approach (RBA) (Interview, Sophat Um 1⁵). Moreover, LWD involves local government—especially CCs—in its programming from the outset by taking advantage of the structure and resources made available through decentralisation. In so doing, LWD tries to create the space for its project villages to claim their rights to development.

In summary, both SPARC and LWD enable people to exercise their agency under the current government structures, thereby bringing about subtle shifts in such structures. Thus, I held Giddens’ more reflexive view of agency at the early stage of this research. The emerging fieldwork results on the decentralisation process and LWD’s RBA have also confirmed this view.

⁵ For detailed information on interviewees, see Appendix 1.

3.2.2 Ontological Dissonance

However, when I kept pondering on people's agency against land grabbing by the domestic and foreign plantation companies in one of the research sites, I came to realise that my understanding of 'how the world works' or my ontology was not sufficient to comprehend what was happening there. Unlike the case of the decentralisation reforms and the resultant lowered structure of local government, it was difficult for people to deal with these companies, as they have dealt with the heart of the neo-patrimonial practice manifested as the complicity of government and domestic and foreign investors. The vested interests of the powerful, based on neo-patrimonialism, significantly constrain people's actions and influence.

Subsequently, as I read through the literature on governance, decentralisation, neo-patrimonialism and land grabbing, and contemplated, I came to the realisation that the decentralisation reforms (and its limited development funds) and social land concessions (SLCs) (as measures to divert the attention from land grabbing in the form of economic land concessions (ELCs) ⁶ (Neef et al., 2013)) virtually do not affect the neo-patrimonial practice. In other words, those rather benevolent policies are nominal or simply gestures and their implementation does not really impact on the neo-patrimonial government's game plan—more specifically, the pockets of the powerful and maintenance of their power. Hence, for land-grabbing, in which the vested interests of the powerful based on neo-patrimonial practice significantly constrain the acts and influence of people's agency, I felt that Giddens' rather dynamic view of agency (and thus his general underestimation of the power of structure) did not have enough exploratory power. In other words, the issue of land-grabbing shifted my ontological understanding of how things really work in Cambodia in a deeper sense and I felt urged to adopt an ontological framework, which can encompass land-grabbing where the justice of redistribution and the neo-patrimonial complicity are in conflict, as a basis for elucidating the agency and structure relationship in that particular site.

3.2.3 Ontological and Epistemological Shift to Critical Realism

Hence I shifted to adopting the critical realist ontology of agency and structure, as it enables me to better explore or have a better epistemological grasp of structures

⁶ SLCs are the Cambodian government's pilot project, which is mainly supported by the World Bank, to allot land to land-poor and landless farmers. Lands granted through SLCs are considerably smaller than those granted to domestic and multinational companies through ELCs (Neef et al., 2013).

and their power in the current rural Cambodian context. Below I will unpack critical realism.

To begin with, I will elaborate the key features of critical realism. First, it posits that objects “have certain structures and causal powers, that is, capacities to behave in particular ways” (Sayer, 2000, p. 11). Critical realists consider that structures are emergent properties that are brought about by the conjunction of multiple elements of the social world (Sayer, 2000). Since emergent properties have “the generative capacities to modify the powers of [their] own constituents in fundamental ways and to exercise causal influences” (Archer, 2000, p. 466), structures are considered as generative mechanisms in critical realism. Hence the world is characterised by “a relational effect of social interaction” (Sayer, 2004b, p. 256) and “the workings of mechanisms which derive from the structures of objects” (Sayer, 2000, p. 15). As such, the critical realist view of structure differs from Giddens’ one in which he equates structure with a more restricted set of rules and resources (Jessop, 2005).

This feature of critical realism is also in sharp contrast with Giddens’ theorisation of the duality of structure where structure and agency are collapsed into each other (Sayer, 2000; Jessop, 2001; Lewis, 2002). Jessop (2001) highlights this:

Giddens...brackets (that is, temporarily ignores) one or other [action or structure] when examining its complementary moment in the duality (1984). But this is to treat structure at any given time in isolation from action, and so implies that a given structure is equally constraining and/or enabling for all actors and all actions simply serving (no more, but no less) as a set of rules and resources for action. Similarly, action at any given time is isolated from structure, as actors are seen to choose a course of action more or less freely and skillfully within these rules and resources. (pp. 1222-1223, comments in brackets added).

In other words, Giddens neither delves into the causal interplay in social interactions described above, nor has specific points of reference such as causal power and emergent properties, thereby merely relying on “*free-floating modalities* (interpretative schemes, facility, norm or knowledge, power and convention)” (Jessop, 2005, p. 47, italics added). Hence, in Giddens’ theorisation, structural transformations happen because of “*unintended consequences* of social action and inaction” (Jessop, 2005, p. 45, italics added).

With regard to the view of agency, critical realism is akin to the structuration theory in that agents draw on structures in order to act, and in turn such actions of

agents reproduce or transform those structures (Lewis, 2002). Also like Giddens' view of agency, people are knowledgeable and reflexive about their contexts and structures over them, according to critical realism (Jessop, 2001). However, critical realism does not consider agents as agential as Giddens does because of the causal powers and emergent properties of structures, whose existence predates people's exercise of their agency (Jessop, 2001; Jessop, 2005). Thus Lewis (2002) argues that because of predated structure that embodies a particular historical distribution of resources and vested interests, structure exerts its causal power and in turn agents are susceptible to such influence. As mentioned already, the structure of land-grabbing practice is an amplified manifestation of the neo-patrimonial complicity and poses some definite constraints on people's agency, unlike the case of the decentralisation reforms. This awareness urged me to adopt the critical realist path-dependent view of agency.

3.2.4 Strategic-Relational Approach

Jessop's (2001; 2005) strategic-relational approach (SRA) refutes Giddens' ontologically 'flat' duality of structure discussed above (Jessop, 2001; Jessop, 2005). In accordance with the above-mentioned sequence where structures predate agency, SRA analyses "structure in relation to action and action in relation to structure" (Jessop, 2001, p. 1223). Specifically, it considers structure as strategically-selective, thereby privileging some actors and policies over others (Jessop, 2001; Jessop, 2005). Through this, "some practices and strategies are privileged [for example, the decentralisation reforms] and others made more difficult to realise [for instance, the reforming of neo-patrimonial ELC practice] according to how they 'match' the temporal and spatial patterns inscribed in the relevant structures" (Jessop, 2005, p. 51, comments in brackets added). Similarly, certain discourses are more privileged than others. Hence, Jessop (2001) argues that "discursive paradigms privilege some interlocutors, some discursive identities/positioning, some discursive strategies and tactics, and some discursive statements over others" (p. 1225).

On the other hand, SRA treats agency as structurally constrained and context-sensitive and thus tries to find ways in which actors strategically analyse contexts for choosing their course of action (Jessop, 2001; Jessop, 2005). More elaborately, SRA emphasises spatio-temporal properties of structures and agency (Jessop, 2001; Jessop, 2005). This is because temporalities and spatialities are inscribed

in specific structures and actors reflexively reorganise structure in particular spatio-temporal horizons (Jessop, 2001; Jessop, 2005). To put it differently, it explores “the relations between structurally-inscribed strategic selectivities and (differentially reflexive) structurally-oriented strategic calculation” (Jessop, 2005, p. 48).

3.3 Methodological Position

This study uses the case study of the NGO, in a more concrete sense this study has taken the form of an ethnographic case study with a grounded theory (GT) approach (Charmaz & Mitchell, 2001). Merriam (1998) points out that a case study addresses a certain unit that a researcher can “fence in” (p. 275), especially in terms of the final product of research. She also states that a case study can employ various methods (Merriam, 1998). As I will discuss later, I used the ethnographic method of participant observation to complement interview methods by, for example, providing more insights into the field through extensive observation (Charmaz & Mitchell, 2001) and helping to build a rapport with research participants, thereby facilitating the collection of sensitive data of their ideas on rights and governance. Merriam (1998) adds that a case study is suitable for ‘how’ type research questions and thus for explicating social processes. Similarly, GT is suitable for examining social processes, being basically concerned with the generation of a substantive theory. Therefore, it is deemed appropriate to use a case study with a GT approach to unravel an unknown process of how the intervention of the rights-based development NGO in Cambodia influences people’s agency in fulfilling their rights.

As mentioned, I originally held Giddens’ view of the agency and structure relationship, namely his structuration theory, as my ontology and epistemology. In that, reflexive and knowledgeable agents draw on structure to formulate and perform actions, whilst their actions determined by such structure reflexively reproduce, reorganise or transform the structure. Such social interactions, in which agency and structures are reconstructed, broadly fall into constructivist ontology and epistemology.

Based therefore on this constructivist ontological and epistemological position of how people’s agency is exercised, rather than on the traditionally positivist GT, I had originally envisaged employing constructivist GT to examine the broader social contexts in terms of the interactions of actors, power relationships, and multiple realities (Clarke, 2005; Charmaz, 2006). However, I have shifted my ontological and

epistemological position to that of critical realism. At that time, through searching the literature, I noticed an understanding has been emerging that critical realism and GT are complementary (for example, Kempster & Parry, 2011; Oliver, 2012). Thus I went beyond constructivist GT to adopt this new critical realist GT as my methodology.

I had also noticed that the results from GT analysis themselves did not portray the whole picture of how things really work as they are mostly based on villagers' perceptions of their actions or inactions (owing to GT's symbolic interactionist bent). I felt that I needed to go further to interpret why things work, in particular by connecting people's perceptions on the ground with generative mechanisms. Sayer (2010) states that "an explanation of social practice will involve...regress from actions through reasons to rules and thence to structure" (pp. 75-76). Critical realist GT pays attention to individual or collective meaning-making as a point of departure in this regress towards understanding causal relations (Oliver, 2012). Then critical realist GT explores a stratified reality by going beyond what is immediately observable through such empirical data (Kempster & Parry, 2011; Oliver, 2012). In order to do so, the weight and scope of literature review, which helps interpret the connection between people's perceptions and unobservable underlying mechanisms, would be larger than the conventional GT. Although this can be a point to be criticised (Kempster & Parry, 2011), a critical realist justification for this is the need for sufficiently depicting the complex overall contexts, only through which better explanatory theories would emerge. Hence, whilst critical realist GT is underpinned by the symbolic interactionist and constructivist epistemology, it goes beyond those to "address both the event itself *and* the meanings made of it" in pursuit of the explication of generative mechanisms and their effects, which is the heart of critical realist GT (Oliver, 2012, p. 378, *italics original*). Therefore, from the critical realist perspective, even intensive research like this ethnographic case study traces macro and even global forces or "provides a window onto larger entities, showing how the part is related to [the] whole" (Sayer, 2000, p. 25).

On the other hand, this very strength of critical realist GT can be a point to be critiqued. Specifically, its evidence or claims—unsubstantiated by data, which are used when exploring and interpreting generative mechanisms and their effects—are criticised (Kempster & Parry, 2011). According to Kempster and Parry (2011), a critical realist answer to this is Sayer's (2000) "practical adequacy," which means that "truth might be better understood...in terms of the extent to which it generates expectations about the

world and about results of our actions which are realised” (p. 43). Namely, if things work according to a critical realist explanation, that explanation is useful (even if it is not substantiated in data) (Oliver, 2012). Nonetheless, Sayer (2004a) also cautions that such knowledge claims by critical realists should be tentative and modest, as our understanding of the world is inevitably constrained by available discourses and conceptual and theoretical frameworks.

Table 1: Comparison of Research Positions between Structuration Theory and Critical Realism.

	Agency-centered	Structure-centered
Ontological and Epistemological Position	Structuration Theory (Constructivism)	Critical Realism
Methodological Position	Constructivist GT	Critical Realist GT
Focus	Micro	Micro-Macro
Methods	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Participant Observation ● Focus Groups ● Individual Interviews ● Document Analysis 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Participant Observation ● Focus Groups ● Individual Interviews ● Document Analysis ● <u>Heavy Emphasis on Literature Review</u>
Expected Findings	Meaning-making	Meaning-making and Causal Relations

Source: Based on Hay (1995) but substantially modified and added to by author

Variations of GT exist, and the inventors of these tend to be dogmatic about their approaches. However, as in the case of my choosing critical realist GT:

Flexibility allowed grounded theory to become a qualitative research standard because everyone could find something they liked and ignore the rest. (Timmermans & Tavory, 2007, pp. 509-510).

Hence, I used what fits in with my research in GT, although I maintained the essence of GT—namely, letting the findings come out of data rather than ‘forcing’ particular frameworks on the data—in order to make my research GT research. Hence this study used a general ‘GT approach’ rather than rigid ‘GT methods.’

3.4 Fieldwork Approach

In total, I spent five months in Cambodia for this study. First, I conducted a two week preliminary investigation in September 2011, to identify a sample NGO. Following that, I stayed in Cambodia for around two months (February - April 2012) to conduct the first main fieldwork. Finally, I went back to Cambodia again for approximately two and a half months (July - September 2012) to complete the remaining main fieldwork. I needed to divide the fieldwork in this way because of my teaching responsibility as a university lecturer in Japan.

The topics of inquiry became steadily clearer as my study progressed (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). This process is known as progressive focusing, in which “the researcher starts with a research focus and initial framework derived from the literature (etic questions), but remains strongly open to the possibility of significant modifications to these, driven by emic questions arising from the field” (Sinkovics & Alfoldi, 2012, p. 824). As a result, the collection of data had become progressively focused as well—specifically through continuously modified interview schedules (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). Due to time constraints during the fieldwork, I did not employ conventional theoretical sampling in GT underpinned by the thorough analysis of each observation and interview, but did employ quasi-theoretical sampling based on the daily analysis of my analytical field notes, as I will elaborate in the Analysis section. Hence, in my field notes I took notes of not only the content and process of observation and interviews together with my reflection on them, but also of analytic ideas emerging from the fieldwork (O’Leary, 2006).

Table 2: Fieldwork Schedule

Activities	Timing
Preliminary Reconnaissance Visit	7-22 September 2011
First Main Fieldwork	13 February - 9 April 2012
Second Main Fieldwork	7 July - 22 September 2012

3.4.1 Life with Dignity (LWD)

As mentioned, I have selected LWD, which contextualises RBA so that it fits the Cambodian context. The Cambodian office of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF), an international NGO, which had been operating in Cambodia for more than three decades, became a local NGO with the new name of LWD at the start of 2011. From my Module Two mini-research on NGO leadership in Cambodia I was able to identify several NGOs that had adopted RBA. In addition, I conducted internet research to further identify NGOs that had adopted RBA in Cambodia. I further conducted snowball sampling by emailing these NGOs and interviewing them during my preliminary reconnaissance visit to Cambodia. Among the samples that I identified, LWD, through experimenting with RBA in their programming or *working it out on the ground*, had reconstructed their own version of RBA and mainstreamed it as their principal operational principle. LWD is now the leading rights-based development NGO in Cambodia and provides various training programmes on RBA not only for local NGOs but also for international NGOs operating in Cambodia. LWD falls within what Merriam (1998) and Flyvbjerg (2006) call “atypical” cases among rights-based development NGOs that subscribe to RBA only because of their asymmetrical power relationships with their donors or international headquarters that promote RBA. Such cases “often reveal more information because they activate more actors and more basic mechanisms in the situation studied” (Flyvbjerg, 2006, p. 229)—in this case, in the course of contextualising the RBA. Therefore, I purposively sampled LWD.

By reflecting on its experiences worldwide, LWF had increasingly come to the realisation that rights were an integral part of development, and its international headquarters in Geneva wanted to initiate RBA in its field operation (Interviews, Ky Bun; Sophat Um 1). Cambodia was relatively amenable to such an idea because of its exposure to democracy since the early 1990s and because both expatriate and local

senior management staff of LWD were committed to experimenting with RBA (Interview, Sophat Um 1). Since the fall of the Khmer Rouge regime in 1979, LWD had been implementing relief and rehabilitation programmes to respond to the post-conflict situations in Cambodia until the 1990s and then shifted its operational mode to participatory community development and empowerment (Busch, 2008). Because of the prompting from its headquarters to initiate RBA as mentioned above, LWD ventured into RBA by consulting the existing literature on it and simultaneously experimenting with it in their programming from 2006 (Interviews, Ky Bun; Tinekor Meas). Nonetheless, the process of introducing and gaining staff confidence in RBA was neither top-down nor coercive (Interviews, Tinekor Meas; Ky Bun). Rather, the former expatriate Country Director appeared to skilfully enable local staff to explore RBA in the light of the Cambodian context through a consultative process not only with the senior management team but also with field-level staff, thereby fostering organisation-wide ownership of RBA (Interviews, Tinekor Meas; Sophat Um 2). Nonetheless, it was initially difficult for field-level staff to become convinced about RBA as they were afraid to deal with local government (Interview, Virak Chhay 1).

LWD is now working with a population of 278,990⁷, in 329 villages and 47 communes in four provinces⁸ (Life with Dignity, 2011a). It has 247 staff, of whom 39 are based at the head office in Phnom Penh, the national capital, and 208 in the four provinces (Life with Dignity, 2011a). Thanks to its history as a former international NGO, it is one of the largest NGOs and is indeed the largest local NGO in Cambodia with the well-funded and large-scale operation. In the field-level offices in the provinces, Programme Managers provide overall leadership. Under them, there are Community Empowerment Officers (CEOs), and under the CEOs there are Community Empowerment Facilitators (CEFs), who directly engage with project participants (PPs). A Gender and Advocacy Liaison Officer (GALO) and a Livelihood Liaison Officer (LLO) in the programme support unit technically support the CEFs' work through, for example, training them and their PPs. Most of the staff based in the field-level offices are not from the programme sites, but mostly from urban areas. In addition, whilst generally NGO jobs are elite employment in post-conflict Cambodia, the fact that many staff moved to LWD from local and even international NGOs indicates that jobs in the

⁷ Total population in the villages where LWD works (Life with Dignity, 2011a).

⁸ The names of provinces, districts, communes, villages and individual research participants are either omitted or replaced with pseudonyms for anonymity, as elaborated in the section of Ethics in this chapter.

well-funded LWD might be more lucrative than other NGOs. Currently two out of four of LWD's executive-level staff are Ph.D. holders.

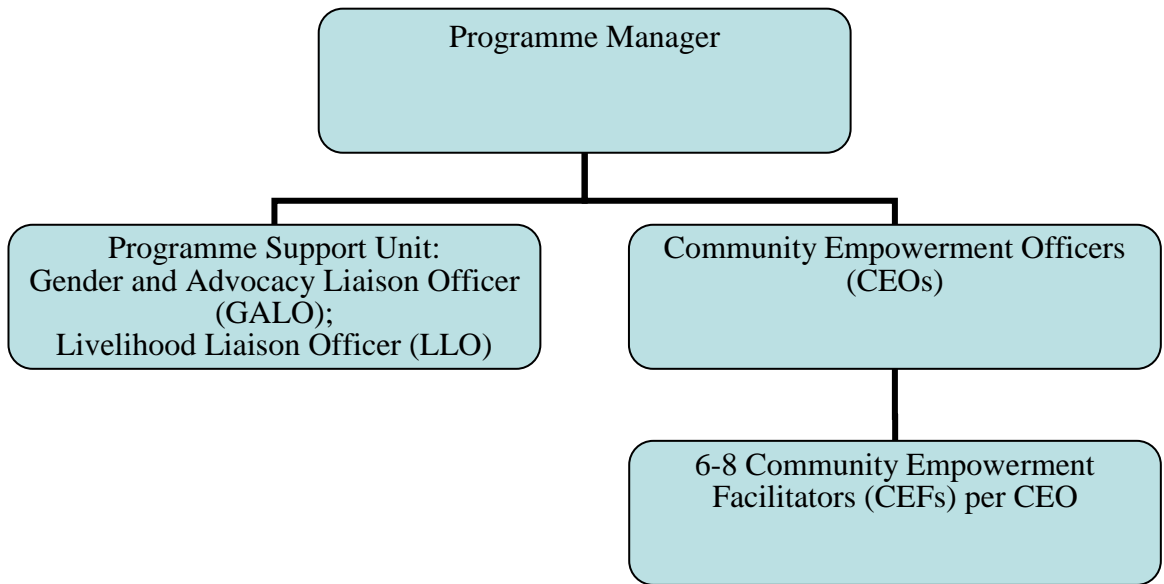


Figure 1: Organisational Chart of LWD's Field-level Office

Source: Adopted and adapted from Life with Dignity (2011a)

3.4.2 Research Sites

To narrow down potential research sites, I discussed these with the Programme Director in the head office (who oversaw LWD's overall programming) upon my arrival in Cambodia for my first fieldwork, and then visited highly potential sites in the different provinces.

As a result, I selected two provinces out of the four in which LWD was operating, in order to triangulate by multiple geographical regions with the aim of presenting findings from diverse geographical contexts and thus of increasing theoretical density in my GT analysis, which will be explained later. To allow for such variations, I chose one of the programme sites where there had been a conflict between government and the Khmer Rouge guerrillas until the late 1990s and where Internally Displaced Persons had returned since then (Interview, Thea Lee). Due to the devastation, the education system there had not functioned for a long time, leading not only to local government's (namely, CCs and the district office (DO)) low institutional capacities and understanding as duty-bearers but also to the low capacities of citizens (Interview, Song Heng). In order to respond to such post-conflict situations, LWD started to implement

relief and rehabilitation activities there in the late 1990s (Interview, Thea Lee). Among the current challenges in that area are people's continued dependency on forest resources, causing deforestation, and ELCs which the central government granted to domestic and foreign plantation companies, leading to severe land conflicts with residents. I then chose the other programme site in another province with a relatively stable history where the local government has relatively higher institutional capacities and understanding as duty-bearers and citizens have relatively higher capacities. Hence in this site, rights-based interactions between government and citizens were more dynamic. Overall, largely because of their traditional livelihood strategy and mentality of relying on forest resources, the first research site appeared to have less participation by villagers in LWD's development activities in terms of the number of participants and active engagement than the second research site did.

I observed that those who participated in LWD's activities were predominantly women, in both research sites. However, in the first research site there was an even lower ratio of men to women who joined LWD's activities, mainly since many men went out of their villages to cut trees from the nearby forests and made charcoal (Interview, Song Heng). Although it is about women as well as men, the plantation companies granted ELCs have been hiring villagers, thereby further reducing the men's participation. On the other hand, even though the second research site had more men participating in LWD's activities, again some of the young men went out of their villages to cut trees, but from distant as well as nearby forests, and others went out to work as construction workers in the provincial capital or Phnom Penh (Interview, Theary Yeng). In the second research site, the shoe and textile factories were hiring a large number of young women, and therefore the majority of female PPs were elderly women and those with small children (Interview, Theary Yeng).

Sample villages were selected at the intersection between the criteria for villages and the criteria for CEFs. I chose four sample villages, two from each research site. Within each province selected, I chose sample villages in the following manner. First of all, in order to answer the research question, sample villages had to be halfway through or towards the end of six to nine years of LWD's intervention, so that LWD's activities in influencing people's agency could be traced. In addition, people living in those villages had to be at certain levels of empowerment or at enhanced levels of agency. Interestingly, LWD has been measuring the level of empowerment for each project

village and they use such categories as: “A=Low Capacity, B=Improved Capacity, C=Advanced Capacity, [and] D=Graduated/Empowered Capacity” (Life with Dignity, 2011a, p. 47). The criteria for this empowerment assessment include: (a) “capacity to manage development process”; (b) capacity to know rights, solve rights-related conflicts and advocate for their rights with duty-bearers outside their community; (c) “economic livelihood”; (d) social development; (e) “environmental conservation and the sustainable use of natural resources”; (f) “disaster risk management and mitigation”; and (g) “gender empowerment and equality” (Lutheran World Federation Cambodia, 2006, pp. 7-9). Each village annually assesses their empowerment level in a participatory manner with the facilitation by its village development committee (VDC) and a CEF working there (Life with Dignity, 2011a). I chose villages categorised as C as it indicated enhanced levels of agency and thus I could trace previous activities that had influenced agency, whilst there were still quite a number of activities currently going on, which I was able to observe.

I chose two CEFs, each of whom covered at least two C villages, to meet the above village criterion. To choose among the CEFs who had been working in multiple C villages, I accompanied some of them individually for their fieldwork for a day or so. The criteria for choosing CEFs included their long working experiences with LWD in order for this research to examine their intervention in the lives of PPs, which is underpinned by their years of experiences. One of the sample CEFs had ten years of experience with LWD, whilst the other had fifteen.

Another criterion was CEFs’ relational skills, in order for me to observe their mature interactions with PPs as well as to facilitate my rapport-building with PPs through the CEFs’ established relationships with them. The CEFs’ cooperative attitude, manifested in their verbal and non-verbal agreement on my accompanying their fieldwork for two weeks for participant observation, was another important factor in selecting them. Related to this, the CEF that I accompanied for the first fieldwork was very open to my observation and rarely seemed to be trying to impress, and I found that this trait was important for facilitating reliable data collection for the second fieldwork. Hence I selected the second sample CEF based on this criterion.

Unlike most of the NGOs that place their field-level offices in provincial capitals, LWD made the strategic decision to place its field-level offices well inside each province—namely, a district far from a provincial town or national roads, which is more

resource-starved—within easy reach of its target villages. Some of the CEFs go even further inside to work in villages there. They actually not only work and but also live there during their working days in order to maintain frequent interaction with PPs for their empowerment.

However, I chose CEFs who worked in close proximity to the field-level offices so that I could commute to their assigned villages daily during my fieldwork. This decision was strategic from the methodological perspective. Hammersley and Atkinson (2007) and Merriam (1998) recommend that in addition to actual observation, researchers should have ample time to process field notes in a timely manner. I also needed to type the notes as well, since I used Nvivo, a qualitative data analysis software, for analysis. Moreover, the quasi-theoretical sampling I employed for GT analysis required constant analysis of up-to-date data. Furthermore, based on quasi-theoretical sampling and progressive focusing, I needed to draft and print out different versions of interview schedules. To do these tasks behind the scene, I needed daily time away from the research villages, and electricity, which was only available at the offices. Despite this arrangement to commute to the research sites, I sensed that I was able to build a good enough rapport through my encounters with villagers through the very relational CEFs.

Thus far, the common criteria for choosing both CEFs have been discussed. Additionally, I employed some different criteria for choosing each CEF. Whilst I selected a CEF with medium capacities from the first research site, I chose a CEF with higher capacities from the second research site, in consultation with the CEOs who supervised and assessed their performance. Doing research on both of them revealed more variations for theoretical density. Finally, although this was not intended and planned, the first CEF happened to be busy with numerous conventional service-delivery activities during my observation, whilst the second CEF happened not to be busy with such activities and thus I was, to a great extent, able to observe her engagement with empowerment and rights-based activities.

Because of gender mainstreaming within the organisation, the majority of CEFs in both research sites were women. In part because of that, after applying the above criteria I ended up choosing female CEFs.

In summary, generally in the first research site, the capacities of citizens and local government (namely, CCs and DOs) were low, whereas in the second research site,

the capacities of citizens and local government were high. In addition, the capacities of the selected CEF in the first site were medium, whilst the capacities of the selected CEF in the second site were high. Finally, the first CEF was busy with more service-delivery activities, whereas the second CEF was more engaged with empowerment and rights-based activities.

Table 3: Criteria for Choosing Research Sites

	Research Site 1	Research Site 2
Capacities of Citizens	Low	High
Capacities of Local Government	Low	High
Capacities of CEFs	Medium	High
Activities of CEFs Observed	More Service-delivery Activities	More Rights-based Activities

Source: Author

3.4.3 Methods

I conducted participant observation, focus group (FG) interviews partly stimulated by a participatory exercise, and individual interviews in this order so as to increasingly build a rapport with research participants.

3.4.3.1 Research Assistant and Transcribers

Choosing a research assistant cum translator (hereafter a research assistant) is critical for data collection (Bujra, 2006) and its simultaneous analysis. My previous job with an international NGO required me to live and work in a district town in rural Cambodia for three years, from which I gained most of my conversational Cambodian language skills and the basic understanding of rural Cambodian culture including non-verbal behaviours⁹. However, my conversational language skills by no means suited interviews, FG interviews and the accurate capture of accounts during participant observation, which actually required higher-level language skills, and I therefore needed

⁹ I worked in Cambodia with that NGO from 1997 until 2007.

a Cambodian research assistant. Through personal network and after screening, I chose one who, in addition to the possession of sufficient skills in English, was available for the extended period of the fieldwork and had some background in rural development, which meant better facilitation of FGs as well as better cultural understanding of and better rapport building with research participants. This person also functioned as a cultural guide and thus a good amount of debriefing took place each day in order for me to clarify, for example, interview contents and processes (Bujra, 2006).

In addition to the research assistant, I also recruited five transcribers cum translators (hereafter transcribers) with the aim of generating quality transcripts in a timely manner. Again through personal network and screening, I recruited three local transcribers: two fourth-year undergraduate students from the Institute of Foreign Languages at the Royal University of Phnom Penh, with some social research experiences, and a person with extensive written as well as oral translation experience. Moreover, two Cambodian postgraduate students at the university for which I am working, were recruited. Audio-recorded data was transcribed and translated by these transcribers. I asked them to transcribe exactly what was said and even include grammatical errors, hesitation, laughter, and tones of voice (Lloyd-Evans, 2006). Since those postgraduate students had a higher command of English than the local transcribers, I had them verify transcripts done by the local transcribers for their accuracy (Lussier, 2008). On the other hand, transcripts done by one of the postgraduate students were checked by the other postgraduate student.

3.4.3.2 Participant Observation

As mentioned, I conducted participant observation by accompanying the sample CEFs for two weeks as they conducted their normal fieldwork at their four assigned villages. I went to the field with them without the research assistant for the first week, because such an assistant was of limited use in participant observation (Bujra, 2006) and I wanted to build rapport directly with the CEFs and PPs. My basic grasp of the Cambodian language and knowledge of Cambodian rural culture enabled me to capture daily conversations and people's non-verbal behaviour to a satisfactory extent. The research assistant joined me for the second week of participant observation. This was to facilitate the rapport-building between him and the PPs (Bujra, 2006), and enable his

smooth transition into the fieldwork. When he joined the participant observation, I followed up things that I did not understand by asking the CEFs through his translation.

I treated the sample CEFs as local informants because of their extensive knowledge of PPs as well as project villages through their working experiences there, whilst I was fully aware and thus needed to consider that their views were still those of outsiders, generally of a higher status and possibly with the organisational bias of LWD. To further strengthen my observation, I partly relied on the observation by the research assistant, who had better language and cultural understanding as a native Cambodian. In addition to observing PPs by accompanying the CEFs, I also observed some key events such as RBA training for LWD staff and PPs and the child rights public forum with local government.

Observed PPs included members of various community-based organisations (CBOs)—such as VDCs, farmer field schools (FFSs) and women’s groups, ordinary villagers, the most vulnerable households (such as female-headed households) to which the LWD gives special assistance, village leaders, deputy village leaders, and village secretaries. Commune councillors were also observed in such an event as the commune disaster preparedness meeting.

One drawback of my accompanying the CEFs was that I was looked on as part of LWD or even its donor (from Japan). This encouraged some PPs to show ‘donor answers,’ only positive aspects, or conversely ‘the list of things that they wanted,’ during observation and subsequent interviews. To minimise this, I verbally communicated to them, whenever possible and appropriate, that I was not part of either LWD or its donors. However, there were a few incidents where research participants were obviously conscious of me and exhibited donor-oriented answers or performance (See Box 1 below). Thus, I reflexively noted and analysed the influence of my act of accompanying the CEFs on observation and subsequent research activities during the fieldwork and data analysis.

Box 1: Incident where Enhanced Outsiders' Identity Amplified 'Donor Answers'

In the middle of the FFS meeting at the community centre in the first research site, the sample CEF left for the field-level office to take care of the urgent business of submitting the report and left the facilitation task to one of the VDC members. Without knowing what to do, this VDC member asked participants about what they needed. As a consequence, the participants listed all kinds of items such vegetable seeds and livestock. This kind of question and the participants' response to it is indicative of their dependency on LWD. After a while, he had no ideas as to what they should do next in the meeting. The research assistant, who knew what to do next because of his observation of the FFS meeting in the other village the previous week and had a background in rural development, was about to suggest to the participants the next thing to do, which was to share agriculture-related problems and to discuss among themselves how to resolve them. I stopped him from doing so since it would 'influence' participant observation. But then I reconsidered my decision and judged that it was 'ethical' to suggest what to do next, as otherwise they would waste their time until the CEF came back. Thus I allowed him to suggest the next step to the participants. I think that part of me as a former NGO worker made me make that decision.

Following that, one of the participants came forward and presented her experience of, for example, organic vaccination for livestock, which she had learned from another NGO. But after a while I noticed that she was staring at and paying attention to us (the research assistant and myself) rather than the participants. We actually prompted her to address the FFS participants rather than us. Next, another member came forward to share her experience. She was more explicit in paying attention to us rather than to the participants. Eventually she presented how LWD had been helping the village by reading the report that she had brought. That time I understood that we had definitely influenced this meeting.

In summary, our identity as outsiders was accidentally enhanced. As a result, their performance of 'donor answers' was amplified.

I used the data from participant observation primarily to compensate for the unreliability of self-reporting data generated through interviews (Bryman, 2008) or because “the data from each can be used to illuminate the other” (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007, p. 102), namely triangulation. My two week presence in each research site during participant observation also helped me build a rapport with the PPs for the subsequent FG interviews and individual interviews (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). Furthermore, knowledge and insights gained through participant observation were incorporated into the modification of the questions for FG and individual interviews as well as into the quasi-theoretical sampling.

Saiki-Craighill (2010) recommends the production of good observation notes by adding missing information and elaborating it for precise coding during GT analysis. To generate such quality notes, I added missing information, typed each note, and then revised it twice for better readability.

3.4.3.3 *Focus Group Interviews*

I conducted FG interviews with PPs. Since rights issues are sensitive topics, pre-existing and acquaintance groups were utilised. Specifically, I used the FFSs, since (a) they had been meeting regularly (every two or three months) and thus could be considered as acquaintance groups; and (b) I happened to have conducted participation observation on them in both research sites and thus was able to build some rapport with their members.

I originally envisaged conducting FG interviews with the VDCs. But after realising that three of the seven VDC members were the government-appointed villager leader, deputy village leader and secretary, I foresaw power asymmetry between government-appointed members and ordinary members who were elected by villagers. Thus I planned to conduct an interview with only four ordinary members. Despite the smaller number than the rule of thumb size of six to ten participants for FGs (Morgan, 1997), I thought and expected that because of their role as VDCs they would be highly involved and thus the group dynamics would be generated. However, on the day of the first interview with a VDC, only two members attended, as the other two were out of village because of their participation in training by another NGO. As a result, I decided to include the villager leader and the deputy village leader in the interview mainly

because it was near the end of the first fieldwork and thus I did not want to miss this opportunity. However and not surprisingly, I found that those government-appointed VDC members had quite contrasting ideas with those of the ordinary VDC members and that one of the latter did not seem to be able to express her opinions candidly in front of the former, and this indeed indicated the power asymmetry between them. Because of this experience and since there were only four ordinary VDC members per village and some of them might be out of village or busy with other commitments, I decided to interview the VDC members individually after this interview.

FG interviews were used in order to gain a wide variety of views of PPs and a feel of collective sense-making, particularly of their change of perspective on their rights to development (Morgan, 1997; Bryman, 2008). I observed that their discussion was stimulated through mutual learning. On the other hand, as typically seen in FGs, there was “a tendency toward conformity” (Morgan, 1997, p. 239-53) where participants repeated the same answers as ones previously mentioned. This tendency might have been enhanced by the cultural tendency of risk aversion.

FGs were partly stimulated by a participatory exercise (that is, the Venn diagram for analysing the power relationships between PPs, local government and economic land concessionaries)¹⁰ (Kumar, 2002). Such “participant-produced images can be used as stimuli in the conduct of interviews” (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007, p. 149). On the other hand, “PRA [one method of which is the Venn diagram] utilises FGs in combination with visual and verbal techniques that have *not* been examined to ascertain their limitations” (Campbell, 2001, p. 385, italics original and comments in brackets added). However, as far as the FGs of this research are concerned, I found more active discussion in the Venn diagram exercise than through the verbal questions alone. This is because instead of the research assistant or myself asking questions, which made them shy, I let them work on the exercise by discussing it together after the initial explanation and with on-going facilitation. Hence, the whole discussion during this exercise was also transcribed, translated and used as essential data. Only after they finished the exercise did I ask some probing questions.

¹⁰ See Appendix 2 for the final version of focus group interview schedules for project participants. Note that there were a few versions used for the different focus groups.



Photo1: Venn Diagram Exercise in the First Research Site

Moderating FGs is a complex and skilled task (Morgan, 1997). Moreover, this study combines FGs with the participatory exercise, making them even more complex. For example, the participants needed to be enabled to come up with the right size of each entity in the Venn diagram exercise in accordance with their discussion. Due to my limited Cambodian language I needed translation assistance, yet translating in the middle of a FG would inevitably stifle the free-flowing discussion (Bujra, 2006). Therefore, I trained the research assistant to moderate FGs. After that I continuously coached him, since, for example, he tended to intentionally lead participants to give particular answers by providing some example answers when receiving little response from them.

As a novice researcher, I myself initially had this same urge for obtaining expected answers from participants, but I later realised that participants' limited responses were partly because the questions themselves or words used in the questions were too difficult for them to understand or their current level of understanding of the topics (especially rights-related ones) was low. Hence, I continuously modified the questions themselves, words used in questions, and processes toward improvement through my personal reflection as well as dialoguing with the research assistant. Nevertheless, it was a challenge to strike a balance between how much I should lead them to answer within the parameters of this research by giving some examples and how much I should let them tell whatever they wanted to tell, especially for the questions related to the abstract notions of rights (See the FG questions for Day 2 in Appendix 2). Related to this, I also noticed that PPs did not really give abstract answers to my abstract questions, but rather told their 'stories' based on their concrete experiences. Hence I modified my abstract questions to questions that were more amenable to the facilitation of such story telling (See the FG questions for Day 2 in Appendix 2).

Each FG lasted for one and a half to two hours and was conducted twice (one session on each day). Morgan (1997) recommends over-recruiting interview participants by 20% in case of some absence. I originally recruited ten people from each FFS given the rule of thumb size of six to ten participants. For the first sessions, nine to ten showed up. But for the second sessions six to nine actually showed up. Each local transcriber, who transcribed and translated audio-recorded data, joined most of their responsible FGs in order to take notes of who spoke so that they could identify who spoke in the audio record. They also simultaneously interpreted interviews for me, as the research assistant was busy with his facilitation responsibilities.

I conducted the FGs prior to individual interviews in order to select PPs judged as worth being investigated through subsequent individual interviews by quasi-theoretical sampling and to build rapport with such persons prior to individual interviews.

In addition to PPs, I also conducted FG interviews with CEFs, CEOs and the GALO of the field-level offices. FGs were formed based on their positions, to foster a non-threatening environment. Hence, CEFs composed one group (four to six persons), whilst CEOs and a GALO, who were of a similar rank, together composed one group

(three people for each research site). I modified interview schedules in accordance with the roles of the interviewees. Although the sizes of some of these FGs were smaller than the rule of thumb size, because of their knowledge gained through their experiences in the field they were highly involved in discussion. Interviews with them lasted between one and a half hours and three hours.

As Table 4 below shows, I conducted nine FGs in total.

Table 4: Focus Group Interviews

	Research Site 1		Research Site 2		Total
	Village 1	Village 2	Village 3	Village 4	
VDCs	1				1
FFSs	1	1	1	1	4
CEFs	1		1		2
CEOs and GALOs	1		1		2
Total	5		4		9

3.4.3.4 Individual Interviews

I conducted individual interviews with PPs including members of various CBOs (such as VDCs, FFSs, women's groups, village banks, rice banks, the agricultural cooperative and youth groups), non-project villagers, the most vulnerable households, village leaders, deputy village leaders and village secretaries. Individual interviews were conducted in order to gain their in-depth and diverse views. Those who participated in individual interviews were selected through quasi-theoretical sampling—for instance, not only villagers who were highly involved in LWD projects but also those who were less involved in order to increase theoretical density. Such quasi-theoretical sampling was partly informed by prior participant observation and FGs—for example, those who mentioned seemingly important and relevant ideas in meetings, training sessions and FGs in the light of the research question. I crafted open-ended questions as well as questions to gain details, which would be amenable to GT analysis¹¹ (Kinoshita, 2003; Charmaz, 2006; Saiki-Craighill, 2006). Like the FGs, some of the interviewees found that some phrases and words (especially rights-related) used in questions were difficult to understand and thus I continuously modified those for improvement.

¹¹ See Appendix 3 for the final and most common version of the individual interview schedule for project participants. Note that different versions were used for different interviews.

Following that, based on the FG and individual interviews, further quasi-theoretical sampling was done to choose PPs who seemed to exhibit a deeper transformation of their perspectives on claiming their rights. I conducted further in-depth interviews with them to try to find out such processes. My idea for these in-depth interviews came from life story interviews that I had employed for Module Two mini-research. Life story interviews, by focusing on particular individuals in particular places, elicit meanings of the significant experiences in their lives (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Riessman, 2008). Merriam and Kim (2012) claim that narrative analysis, of which life story interviews are part, suits research on TL, as interviewees are enabled to share such significant (and hence probably transformative) personal experiences through story-telling. An interview schedule for each respondent was tailored based on their previous narrative of perspective transformation¹². However, some of the interviewees had difficulties in articulating such processes, perhaps due to their lack of experience and ability to think that way.

In addition to PPs, this study also interviewed LWD's six senior staff, including two Programme Managers who were in charge of LWD's programmes at the research sites. I interviewed those senior staff in English, so the interviews would flow better, as they had a good command of English. I asked the Cambodian postgraduate students in my university to transcribe these interviews as they had a better understanding of English with a Cambodian accent. Finally, government representatives, including two commune chiefs from the research communes and two district chiefs from the research districts were interviewed.

The details of interview procedures are as follows. The duration of each interview was between thirty minutes to one and a half hours. I modified interview schedules as the study became progressively focused as well as in accordance with the roles and identities of the interviewees. The interviews were audio-recorded. However, I observed that some research participants became nervous when I started audio-recording. In fact, some of the government representatives were hesitant about and declined the use of the audio-recorder and I therefore stopped audio-recording them.

Another problem was interview sites for respondents in the villages, which were normally the ground floor of their houses on stilts. In other words, interview sites were

¹² An example of the life story interview schedule for perspective transformation is in Appendix 4.

open-air, where anyone could watch and listen. I recall a few incidents in which respondents started worrying that someone might have been overhearing their interviews. I tried to choose places where there was less possibility of that, but given the open-air lifestyle of rural Cambodia there was not much I could do.

I also noticed the research assistant's misinterpretation, which made me misunderstand respondents' narratives and thus I asked them further inappropriate questions. I had asked him to take notes for accurate interpretation and afterwards considered that I should have reinforced that practice. On the other hand, he and I were aware that his note-taking had disrupted some interviewees' speaking. Therefore, what I did afterwards was to have the transcribers even transcribe the research assistant's verbal interpretation for me so that I was able to identify gaps between what research participants said and how the research assistant interpreted.

Although this research does not aim to achieve theoretical saturation in GT analysis in the conventional sense, as will be discussed later, it is still good to present here, for justifying this research's sample numbers, that in general data equivalent to 20 to 60 individual interviews are required for theoretical saturation or the generation of a substantive theory (Butler-Kisber, 2010). As for this research, in addition to data from the around five week participant observation and nine FG interviews, I conducted 45 individual interviews¹³, which as a total are likely to be more than sufficient even for the standard theoretical saturation.

Table 5: Individual Interviews

Project Participants	19
Project Participants (Life story interviews)	9
Non-project Villagers	3
Villager Leaders	4
Commune Chiefs	2
District Chiefs	2
LWD Senior Staff	6
Total	45

¹³ This figure excludes informal conversations and interviews as well as email interviews, for example, to inquire into some background information.

3.5 Analysis

3.5.1 Procedures

Corbin and Strauss (1990) and Kinoshita (2003) point out that writing an analytic process itself helps to justify it as a valid GT process and hence I will set out here how I analysed the data. The data analysed included not only primary data from interviews, FGs and participant observation but also secondary data such as LWD's organisational documents (its current long-range plan, evaluation reports and RBA manual) and the district development plan. I had tried to read each piece of data (for instance, each transcript) as well as its corresponding field note first before coding (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Initial coding was done in a spontaneous manner to "spawn a fresh view of the data" (Charmaz, 2006, pp. 1350-66) or, to put it differently, to 'let data speak' without contaminating the coding with my preconceptions and theoretical knowledge. Broadly speaking, I generated concepts and then formed categories and eventually tried to identify the overall move or direction of the process in question as well as to interrogate and revise the extant theories through the constant comparison between the coding, between the coding and concepts, between concepts, between concepts and categories, and between categories (Corbin & Strauss, 1990; Kinoshita, 2003; Charmaz, 2006; Saiki-Craighill, 2006). Hence, concepts and categories were constantly revised, added and removed (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Periodically, I re-coded the earlier coding with newly emerging concepts, since my understanding of the reality became reshaped and therefore the coding changed. Concepts were made up of the coding which indicated not only similar patterns but also variations to show theoretical density and, likewise, categories were made up of concepts which indicated not only similar patterns but also variations to show theoretical density (Corbin & Strauss, 1990; Kinoshita, 2003; Charmaz, 2006; Saiki-Craighill, 2006). As indicated earlier, the whole analytical process was assisted by Nvivo.

Since concepts and categories were the outcome of my detailed and in-depth analysis of the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1998), I constantly wrote memos on my emerging ideas about relationships between the coding, between the coding and concepts, between concepts, between concepts and categories, and between categories as well as on why and how concepts and categories had been formed or revised. The former includes the records of merging multiple specific concepts into a more general concept and dividing a single general concept into more specific concepts as well as

problematism mutually antithetical concepts or identifying affinities between similar concepts. I also recorded in memos how the literature influenced my analysis, as well as how the literature enabled me to connect people's perceptions with macro and global structures in critical realist GT. All in all, whenever I had ideas about, for example, the relationship between particular concepts—even when I was not sure about those—and questions, I recorded it in memos.

I periodically drew diagrams based on concepts and categories to see emerging directions from the analyses-in-progress, and based on those diagrams I wrote storylines. The outcome of this exercise was also useful for identifying further areas of reading and appropriate theoretical frameworks.

For writing data analysis, I used the process as part of an analytic process (Kinoshita, 2003; Charmaz, 2006). For example, writing storylines itself was a useful analytic process. In addition, I shifted some concepts and categories from the original diagrams as their relationships became clearer in the process of writing the analytical chapters.

Since GT is to explore variations rather than to seek for generalisation, I did not necessarily rely on the number of times a particular idea was mentioned (that is, a concept with more coding). Rather, the extent to which I had to rely on either the number or variations depended on what the data was telling me. Certainly, the number gave me an idea of the importance of the issue and how widespread it was among research participants and hence I inserted such information in the analytical chapters. However, if theoretically and substantively particular descriptions were important, albeit with less coding, I drew on theories and substantive contexts as interpretive commentary for supporting those less coded ideas in the analytical chapters. For example, LWD's senior staff or the evaluators of LWD's programmes employed highly conceptualised ideas, which often captured the essence of the issues. Nonetheless, it does not mean that I naively accepted such ideas, as those could be the sanitised and idealised view of the reality especially for organisational justifications. Thus, if those ideas contradicted the perceptions and behaviours of PPs and LWD's frontline staff as well as unobservable yet existing micro and macro forces, I considered there would be a margin of doubt. In fact, overall I have tried to privilege the voices coming from as low a stratum among research participants as possible, such as PPs and CEFs.

3.5.2 Relationship with Extant Theories

I was fully aware that I could not escape from my preconceptions (for example, my assumptions, hunches and theories) in this research (Charmaz, 2006). This does not mean that I brought these into the data analysis intentionally and from the outset, but does mean that I was reflexive about their influence in analysis (Charmaz, 2001). Overall I attempted to “present descriptions and understanding that reflect the social actors’ points of view rather than adopting entirely the researcher’s point of view” (Blaikie, 2009, p. 91). However, especially toward the later stage in data analysis, I re-cast these meanings within the language of the theoretical frameworks if they became relevant for specific analyses¹⁴ (Charmaz, 2006). Nonetheless, I did not naively fit extant theoretical frameworks into emerging findings. Rather, I tried to demonstrate how each emerging finding “*refines, extends, challenges or supersedes*” such frameworks (Charmaz, 2006, pp. 4361-76, italics original) as in the case of my ontological and epistemological shift to critical realism. In other words, I sought to be “sensitive not only to the different positions, but also to the racks between theories, the spaces in literature, as well as in the field itself where the taken for granted categories of sociology are broken, and where theory indeed does emerge from the ground up” (Timmermans & Tavory, 2007, p. 503). Along this line I attempted to problematise the concepts of TL as it is criticised for the lack of research that critically interrogates the TL theory, or the tendency of TL researchers to fit their findings into the existing TL theory framework (Taylor & Cranton, 2012; Taylor & Snyder, 2012).

This re-casting process, or the intellectual leap, is called abduction. Critical realist GT accentuates this abduction process with transcendental questions, “‘what must be true for this to be the case?’ or ‘what makes this possible?’ and seek an explanation for generative mechanisms at a deeper ontological level” (Oliver, 2012, p. 380). To do so, critical realist GT draws on theories to vertically analyse a phenomenon (Oliver, 2012). The unobservability of realities through empirical data requires such assistance from extant theories. It is particularly useful to employ such knowledge to analyse what is unsaid; for example:

¹⁴ I read more literature as well as rereading the literature read already, as I analysed the data. This prompted me to review findings emerging from GT analysis. I did it, yet I did not do so to the extent that I re-interpreted the whole data from these new insights from the literature, since doing so would pose the danger of forcing the data into the theoretical frameworks and hence would not make this study a GT study. I valued my initial findings emerging from GT analysis.

When social workers speak of relationship-based practice but struggle to recall personal knowledge of their clients...[there may be] tensions between client care and neo-liberal discourses of managerialism and efficiency. (Oliver, 2012, p. 382, comments in brackets added).

3.5.3 Modified GT

In addition to critical realist GT, I also employed Kinoshita's (2003) modified GT. Unlike Strauss and Corbin's (1998) version of GT, it does not recommend 'forcing' particular analytical frameworks such as axial coding and theoretical coding (Kinoshita, 2003). This is to maintain the same distance between data and the coding across the board so that the correspondent relationship between coding and retrieval would be ensured and hence the analysis would be grounded on data (Kinoshita, 2003). Moreover, it focuses on contexts rather than line-by-line coding where contexts tend to be disregarded (Kinoshita, 2003). In order to avoid such decontextualised textual analysis, which is often criticised as a weakness of GT (Timmermans & Tavory, 2007), and therefore to re-contextualise GT analysis, I coded field notes to include contexts in which interviews took place in analysis in addition to interview transcripts themselves (Lussier, 2008). For example, even the tones of research participants' voices and their non-verbal behaviours were used as the data to be analysed.

Furthermore, Kinoshita's GT does not require a core category and theoretical saturation in the conventional sense, as those are rather artificial and manipulative (Kinoshita, 2003). According to Oliver (2012) also, it is now rare to consider theoretical saturation as a fixed point where truth is revealed in GT research in the embracement of the fluidity of knowledge generation. Kinoshita's GT instead tries to identify the overall move or direction of the process in question emerging from analysis. In the messy causal interplays in the world, finding the overall move or direction should be 'indicative enough' for suggesting how the intervention of LWD influences people's agency and how various forces influence people's learning in their move towards fulfilling their rights. This way of thinking is in line with critical realist GT that modestly sees theoretical saturation as a point where "the theory arising from inquiry has, for the time being, greater explanatory power than its rivals" (Oliver, 2012, p. 379). Namely, categories that can explain such a move or direction rather than an artificial core category are of significance. Therefore and in summary, theoretical saturation is determined by the degree of sophistication and elaboration of such a move or direction

as well as the pre-set range of data to be collected—for my research, through two pieces of the main fieldwork.

Speaking of the two pieces of the fieldwork, the short duration of each piece (two to two and a half months at a time) made it difficult for me to follow the GT procedure of theoretical sampling that entails the time-consuming transcribing, translating, and analysing of data after and for each interview. This practical constraint also made me adopt Kinoshita's (2003) modified GT, in which I collected 'base data' in the first fieldwork, based on pre-set yet ongoing flexible criteria rather than pure theoretical sampling (Kinoshita, 2003; Lussier, 2008). Such criteria meant that I conducted quasi-theoretical sampling and used progressively focused questions based on the daily analysis of my analytical field notes (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). The substantive analysis of the 'base data' was done whilst I was in Japan between the two main fieldworks (Kinoshita, 2003). I then collected an additional quantity of data in the second fieldwork, this time partly informed by theoretical sampling from the 'base data' (Kinoshita, 2003).

3.6 Ethics

3.6.1 Informed Consent

Information Sheets were provided to all the participants for individual as well as FG interviews. Participants in both types of interviews were also supposed to give me informed consent to participate through completing and signing a Consent Form, and some of them did so. I also verbally explained the contents of Information Sheets and Consent Forms to them. But during the first FG, I found that some of the participants could not write their names on the Consent Form or had difficulties doing so. Thus from the next round of FGs, I made a list of participants first and then asked them just to give their thumb impressions instead.

For participant observation, it is not practical for all participants to be fully informed or consent to participate in an ethnographic study like this one (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). Originally, I was planning to announce the research verbally at one of the VDC meetings where there were some government-appointed VDC members including a village leader and to give them a hard copy of the Information Sheet. Then I expected that they would subsequently inform me of whether the whole village would consent to participate, as the village's consensus. However, when I met a village leader

for the first time in the first fieldwork and consulted with her about how I should go about informed consent for participant observation in her village, she just signed the document there and then. So did the next villager leader that I met. Thus it appeared that Cambodian hierarchical culture did not fit the egalitarian notion of a ‘village’s consensus’ that I envisaged. Nonetheless, villagers still needed to be informed who I was and why I was doing what I was doing. In this regard, my accompanying the CEFs in participant observation helped to some extent. When there were meetings and training sessions and even when the CEFs made a visit to an individual household, the relational CEFs always introduced me to PPs, and on such occasions I explained to them who I was and why I was doing what I was doing. This informal way of informing and gaining consent from villagers was more naturalistic and amenable to the flow of my fieldwork, the CEFs’ fieldwork, and villagers’ schedules.

3.6.2 Confidentiality

All information that might lead to identifying the research participants was either anonymised by using pseudonyms or omitted. However, confidentiality was not completely guaranteed for information which research participants disclosed in the FGs due to the presence of other participants there, although they were reminded at the beginning of each session to keep such information confidential (Morgan, 1997). This problem was communicated to them.

The research assistant and the transcribers had access to data, and signed an agreement that stipulated that they would keep the data strictly confidential. Moreover, I deliberately allocated interview data with sensitive content to the postgraduate students in my university, since I had, so to speak, more ‘weight’ with them than with the local transcribers, as a lecturer of the university where they studied and through which they had obtained a scholarship from the Japanese government, thereby probably discouraging them from revealing sensitive information.

3.7 Conclusion

This chapter showed how I manoeuvred my research journey, making ontological, epistemological, methodological and analytical choices and how I actually went about the fieldwork and data analysis. In particular, I sought to develop a case grounded in the variations of the realities of people on the ground yet vertically

informed by macro forces influencing such realities. Specifically, I first illustrated my shift from the originally held constructivist ontology and epistemology to critical realism because of the lack of explanatory power of the former especially for generative mechanisms that constrained the acts and influence of people's agency. Second, I depicted how such a shift led me to the adoption of an ethnographic case study with a critical realist GT approach in order to delve into not only people's perceptions but such generative mechanisms. Third, I showed how the sample NGO was purposively identified and how research sites were selected to increase theoretical density. Fourth, I explained how the research assistant, the transcribers, participant observation, and FG and individual interviews were employed strategically as well as in response to the conditions of the fieldwork. Fifth, I delineated the GT procedure and highlighted how critical realist GT interacts with extant theories in analysis and what other modifications I made to GT for it to suit my research. Sixth, I mentioned how I attempted to address major ethical issues whilst dealing with the contingencies of the fieldwork. Throughout these processes, my research has become progressively more focused.

Chapter 4: Rights-based Approach and Transformative Learning

In this chapter, I will present the literature review on the rights-based approach (RBA), the substantive field of this study, as well as transformative learning (TL), one of the main theoretical frameworks. I will first present the basic idea of the RBA to lay the groundwork for the subsequent analytical chapters. However, I will integrate literature pertinent to specific analytic components into those chapters in line with the flow of GT analysis. The second half of this chapter will then be spent on the in-depth literature review on TL.

4.1 The Rights-based Approach (RBA)

RBA has gained attention in the arena of international development since the middle of the 1990s due to the convergence of different socio-historical strands during that period (Cornwall & Nyamu-Musembi, 2004; Kawamura, 2008), as will be unpacked later. It is still one of the key development discourses and trends.

What has also emerged is a deeper understanding in which poverty is caused by structural and political problems such as inequality, exclusion and corruption and hence its root cause is the deprivation of human rights, which is associated with those injustices (Kawamura, 2013). Thus, the shift to RBA means a shift from the orthodox needs-based approach, which tends to only address the symptoms of poverty, to the approach that aims at the fulfilment of rights (Cornwall & Nyamu-Musembi, 2004), through which the structural or root causes of poverty are addressed (Uvin, 2007). RBA is essentially a political and sensitive process as it deals with rights issues, governance, and social norms and hierarchies (Macpherson, 2009).

As Figure 2 below indicates, in order to fulfil a wide spectrum of human rights, generally RBA aims at empowering the community of rights-holders (that is, normally citizens) to claim their rights from duty-bearers (in many cases, governments), whilst it aims at supporting, developing and lobbying duty-bearers to be more responsive and accountable to such demands from rights-holders (Cornwall & Nyamu-Musembi, 2004). In other words, RBA is the process to ensure the accountability of duty-bearers towards rights-holders (Uvin, 2007).

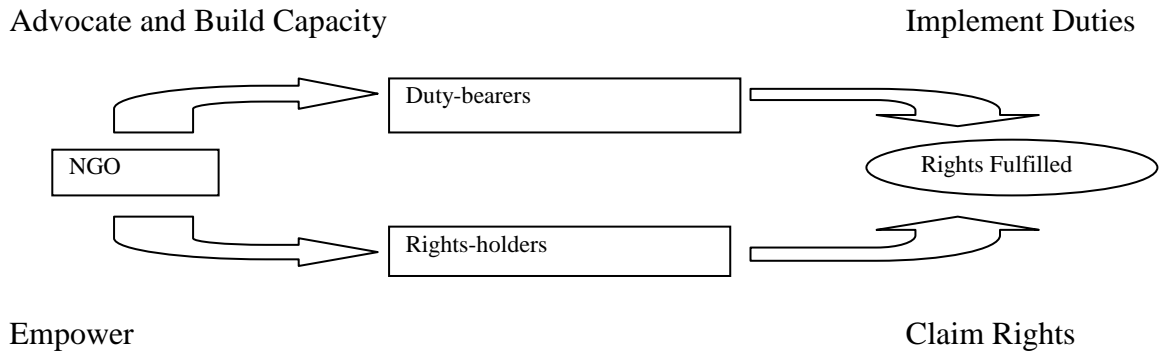


Figure 2: Rights-based Approach

Source: Kimura (2013), which is originally adopted and adapted from the Lutheran World Federation Cambodia (2009)

In this section, I will first map out the genealogy of RBA. Then I will problematise its implementation difficulties stemming from its western conceptualisation. Finally, the category of the middle-ground RBA will be introduced.

4.1.1 Genealogy of the Rights-based Approach¹⁵

The recognition gained by and the subsequent implementation of RBA since the mid-1990s has resulted from the convergence of different socio-historical strands, presented below.

As the Cold War ended, western governments no longer had to shy away from economic, social and cultural (ESC) rights, which had been considered part of a collective and socialist agenda for East-West geopolitical reasons (Cornwall & Nyamu-Musembi, 2005; Macpherson, 2009). Therefore, this post-Cold War climate formed the groundwork for a more comprehensive view of human rights, including not only civil and political (CP) rights, which had been considered part of an individualistic and capitalistic agenda, but also ESC rights (Cornwall & Nyamu-Musembi, 2004; Pettit & Wheeler, 2005).

In terms of the international human rights framework, the 1986 UN Declaration on the Rights to Development—which proposed the inclusion of ESC rights—paved the way for linking traditional CP rights with development processes (Cornwall & Nyamu-Musembi, 2004; Uvin, 2007). In the post-Cold War climate, the idea of rights to development were re-adopted at the 1993 UN World Conference on Human Rights in

¹⁵ For a large part of this section, I draw on Kimura (2013).

Vienna and became “a global legal consensus” (Cornwall & Nyamu-Musembi, 2004; Gready & Ensor, 2005; Uvin, 2007, p. 598).

Particularly from the Vienna Conference onwards, the activism of NGOs and indigenous social movements in the South started influencing international agenda-setting processes. For example, women’s rights groups partly influenced the outcome of the Vienna Conference with a renewal of support for human rights (Nelson & Dorsey, 2008). At the subsequent World Social Development Summit at Copenhagen 1995, NGOs and indigenous social movements in the South led a campaign for RBA (Cornwall & Nyamu-Musembi, 2004).

From the viewpoint of development implementation, an alternative to ‘technical fix’ and project approaches and the persistent focus on modernisation has been called for. The reason for this is that, first of all, structural and political problems such as inequality and exclusion have not been solved by depoliticised technocratic solutions and limited piece-meal interventions (Pettit & Wheeler, 2005). Second, the persistent modernisation and neoliberal assumption and orientation behind policies, programmes and projects tend to be aloof from structural inequality and political oppression (Nelson & Dorsey, 2008). Hence, there has been a growing awareness and impetus where development needs to tackle rights and political fronts (Pettit & Wheeler, 2005; Macpherson, 2009).

Related to the strand just mentioned, the general shift in aid delivery from sector/project approaches to direct budget support to governments has given leverage for donors to influence governments in terms of their governance and accountability (Cornwall & Nyamu-Musembi, 2004). From a slightly different angle, Uvin (2007) and Macpherson (2006) argue that the failure of structural adjustment programmes was attributed to governments’ lack of governance, accountability and democracy. Hence the conditionality of further aid is linked to those issues (Macpherson, 2006), and one of the manifestations of such conditionality is RBA.

Related to the previous two strands of development implementation and governance, participation discourse had been discussed only as a means through which development interventions were implemented, and thus had not been considered as a means through which people become involved in decision-making or influenced it in the wider political space, to solve structural and political problems such as inequality, exclusion and the lack of accountability (Hickey & Mohan, 2004). Therefore, Cornwall

and Nyamu-Musembi (2004) and Hicky and Mohan (2004) suggest that rights are a way of reframing participation as political processes; in other words, re-politicising an approach to development. Cornwall and Nyamu-Musembi (2004) argue that:

Rights talk provides a new frame within which to signal a move towards a more genuinely inclusive and democratic process of popular involvement in decision-making over the resources and institutions that affect people's lives. (p. 1424).

Lastly, Amartya Sen's work of development as freedom contributed to the formation of the RBA (Gready & Ensor, 2005; Uvin, 2007; Nelson & Dorsey, 2008). His notion of substantive and expanded freedoms¹⁶ is akin to the aforementioned more comprehensive concept of human rights which emerged because of the post-Cold War climate and includes CP and ESC rights (Sen, 1999; Macpherson, 2006). Sen (1999) argues that these expanded freedoms are both the *goals* and the *processes* of development; namely, rights are among the *constituent* elements of development on their merits, whilst they play *instrumental* roles in development. More specifically on the instrumental roles of rights, structural and political problems of the kind mentioned above bring about a lack of freedom or deprivation of rights, by which people cannot fully exercise their capacities, thereby causing poverty (Sen, 1999; Gready & Ensor, 2005; Nelson & Dorsey, 2008).

As seen, although RBA includes indigenous experiences of the South and lessons learnt there, it cannot escape the fact that it has been re-packaged as one of the international human rights discourses in the West. Hence, Nelson and Dorsey (2008) stress that "rights-based development initiatives are not only grounded philosophically in internationally recognised human rights [in the West], they are identified, designed, implemented, monitored, and evaluated with reference to those human rights standards" (pp. 1039-48, comments in brackets added). Whilst this clearly sets accountability and standards that aid agencies need to meet, it is rather positivistic that—regardless of contextual differences—RBA calls for the adherence to 'internationally recognised human rights.' This has caused some implementation difficulties in RBA, as will be discussed in the next section.

¹⁶ These freedoms include "elementary capabilities like being able to avoid such deprivations as starvation, under-nourishment, escapable morbidity and premature mortality, as well as the freedoms that are associated with being literate and numerate, enjoying political participation and uncensored speech and so on" (Sen, 1999, p. 36).

4.1.2 Implementation Difficulties of the Rights-based Approach¹⁷

In this section, I will problematise implementation difficulties entailed by RBA, which stem from its western conceptualisation and have to do with its relations with government, through a few critical empirical studies. Plipat (2005), through his interview research, highlights the fact that the international development NGOs operating in Vietnam—which adopted RBA—opted for a cooperation approach with the socialist government, instead of the confrontational kind of approach that is normally entailed by the western discourse of RBA. The reason was that the confrontational approach would irritate the oppressive government and thus would only bring harm to these NGOs. In contrast, the cooperative approach, in which NGOs and the government collaborate in fulfilling human rights, was posited to enable NGOs to better fulfill human rights and influence policies, although it would not bring about substantive changes in power relations and immediately stop human rights violations.

Similarly, in the region of Tanzania where both the local government and communities are resource-scarce, Macpherson (2009), through his ethnographic study, finds that ActionAid¹⁸ Tanzania (a field office of an international NGO) unreflexively adopted and implemented the western discourse of RBA due to its power asymmetry with its headquarters. The issue of NGOs' power relationships with their headquarters or donors is not unique to the case of rights-based NGOs, but is a general phenomenon of the whole NGO industry (Kimura 2010). MacPherson (2009) then considers the confrontational relationship between ActionAid Tanzania—which changed its focus from the service-delivery approach (SDA) to RBA—and the local government as “operationally preconstructed and geared toward Northern political ideals of democratisation” (p. 274). Patel and Mitlin (2009) show hesitation in adopting an explicit RBA, highlighting that NGOs “have to avoid antagonising the state in ways that would increase their vulnerability to adverse state action, and must instead encourage the state to view their ideas positively” (p. 108). For this particular case, Macpherson (2009) suggests that a long-term RBA should be complemented by a short-term SDA to ease the tensions that the NGO has with the government. Harris-Curtis et al. (2005), through interviews with 17 European NGOs, also concur with this, by emphasising that

¹⁷ For a large part of this section, I draw on Kimura (2013).

¹⁸ ActionAid (an NGO that originated in the UK) is the most committed to RBA among international (development) NGOs (Nelson & Dorsey, 2008).

the direct and explicit application of human rights tends to be alien to many contexts and to be rejected, and thus many NGOs find it more beneficial not to bring rights to the foreground, particularly in resource-scarce areas.

Here it is useful for analysing rights-based NGOs' SDA and RBA to employ Shigetomi's (2001) analytical framework for the operating spaces for NGOs in different country contexts. He considers that economic space and political space are two factors that determine the operating spaces for NGOs. The economic space is where government, market and communities fail to distribute resources to citizens, thereby leaving a space for NGOs to deliver those needed resources. On the other hand, the political space is where NGOs can operate without being influenced by government regulations. In other words, the more tyrannical a government is, the less space is made available for NGOs to operate in order to, for example, lobby such a government. Hence, according to this framework, the extent to which SDA is implemented depends on the economic space in the local context, whereas the extent to which RBA is implemented depends on the political space.

4.1.3 Middle-ground RBA

Friis-Hansen and Kyed (2009) categorise RBA into three forms. The first one is orthodox human rights organisations (NGOs) that promote universal rights in a top-down manner and practise advocacy to central government institutions. The second one focuses on the empowerment of rights-holders and locally defined demands as contextualised rights. These two approaches often do not consider local government, the centre of decentralisation reforms, as the key duty-bearer to be engaged with. On the other hand, the third form, "the middle-ground RBA," engages with local government, as well as with central government and citizens. Hence, it has a comparative advantage in the context of decentralisation over the previous two forms. It also mediates universal rights and contextualised rights through a gradual realisation of right and utilises human rights principles rather than abstract rights as a point of departure.

The middle-ground RBA has other synergetic relationships with decentralisation. For example, through rights awareness training on both sides (local government and citizens), they become aware of their respective rights and duties and start exercising these (Friis-Hansen & Kyed, 2009). Moreover, the middle-ground RBA strengthens local government's downward accountability through creating participatory processes

between it and the citizens (Mitlin, 2004; Friis-Hansen & Kyed, 2009; Thede, 2009), resulting in service delivery that is based not on charity or clientelism but on citizens' rights and government's duties (Friis-Hansen & Kyed, 2009). Such participatory processes also function as a capacity building venue for citizens and local government through "dialogue and collaboration, joint training in HR [human rights] principles, and forums or committees for development planning, M & E [monitoring and evaluation] and implementation" (Friis-Hansen & Kyed, 2009, p. 16, comments in brackets added). Furthermore, Friis-Hansen and Kyed (2009) identify frequent interactions between local government and people as being essential since those "enhance...the motivation of both to participate in decision-making and maintenance activities" (p. 64).

4.2 Transformative Learning Theory

The TL theory suggests that some forms of learning—which are called 'transformative', indicating dramatic change (Taylor & Cranton, 2012)—appear to have the potential to foster people's agency in order for them to claim their rights in oppressive contexts. Under authoritarian forms of government such as the Cambodian one, people have developed a sense in which they feel fearful of and are utterly submissive to such an institution. TL seems to have a particular pertinence to RBA in such contexts, since it purports to be able to transform people's perspective and foster their confidence, thereby paving the way for them to claim their rights from government.

Although TL was originally theorised by Jack Mezirow (1978), in this section I will mostly review articles and books published after 2000, given the rapid expansion of TL research. In particular, the core constructs of TL have been modified, and its conceptual framework has been re-shaped and expanded because of a growing body of empirical research. Hence in this study, rather than relying on Mezirow's theory alone, I attempt to employ this expanded framework of TL theory.

Below, I will first present the definition, core constructs and process of Mezirow's TL. I will then show some key critiques of the TL theory and the resulting expanded framework.

4.2.1 Definition, Core Constructs and Process

TL is defined as “learning that transforms problematic frames of reference to make them more inclusive, discriminating, reflective, open, and emotionally able to change” (Cranton, 2006; Mezirow, 2009, p. 22). Mezirow (2009) goes on to say that such transformed frames “are more likely to generate beliefs and opinions that will prove more true or justified to guide action” (p. 22). A frame of reference, according to Mezirow (2000; 2009), is a meaning perspective, the structure of assumptions and expectations, or the predisposition, through which we shape our perception, cognition and feelings. Often our frames of reference represent our cultural paradigms or personal perspectives (Mezirow, 2000).

There are four key elements in TL: experiences, critical reflection, reflective discourse and action (Merriam et al., 2007). Experiences are the basis of critical reflection, which plays a key role in assessing problematic frames of reference (Merriam, 2004). Empirical research suggests experience as a necessary ingredient for fostering TL. In particular, what Mezirow (2000) originally termed “disorienting dilemmas” are found to be the basis for TL. Berger (2004) calls them “the edge of knowing,” adding that “it is in this liminal space that we can come to terms with the limitations of our knowing and thus begin to stretch those limits” (p. 338). Fetherston and Kelly (2007) identify the importance of creating disruptions (disorienting dilemmas) in learning-settings, and Taylor (2009) points out that “value-laden course content and intensive experiential activities offer experiences that can be a catalyst for critical reflection and can provide an opportunity to promote transformative learning” (p. 6). Among different types of reflections, premise reflection, which questions one’s premises—“why do I value my assumption, belief and perspective?” (Taylor, 2009, p. 7)—is most likely to lead to TL (Cranton, 2006; Kitchenham, 2008; Mezirow, 2009; Taylor, 2009).

Another key element in TL is reflective discourse or dialogue. Dialogue with others plays a key role in critical reflection, as Taylor (2009) highlights:

Dialogue becomes the medium for critical reflection to be put into action, where experience is reflected on, assumptions and beliefs are questioned, and habits of mind are ultimately transformed. (p. 9).

Finally, TL is expected to result in action. However, the TL theory has been critiqued for the discrete or epochal scope of transformative change with a clear beginning and a clear end within a finite timeframe (Schugurensky, 2002; Newman, 2012) and there has been a growing body of evidence (for instance, Daloz, 2000; Kovan & Dirkx, 2003) which suggests that TL happens incrementally without a step-by-step process.

Drawing on Habermas' (1984) conceptualisation of various learning domains, Mezirow (2000) maintains that instrumental learning and communicative learning in particular are major ones and relevant to TL. Instrumental learning is learning to control physical and social environments, which is task-oriented in nature (Mezirow, 2000). Communicative learning's definition falls within two categories: (a) learning others' values, norms and feelings; and (b) rethinking one's own values, norms and feelings (Mezirow, 2000; Sims & Sinclair, 2008), which are relevant to reflective discourse or dialogue. TL may happen in both domains, as Mezirow (2000) points out:

Becoming critically reflective of assumptions underlying content, process, or premise is common in both instrumental and communicative learning. (p. 21).

4.2.2 Critique of the Transformative Learning Theory and Expanded Framework

There have been a number of articles that critically review Mezirow's TL theory from theoretical points of view as well as based on empirical research (for instance, Brookfield, 2000; Finger & Asun, 2001; Schugurensky, 2002; Merriam, 2004; Cranton, 2006; Merriam et al., 2007; Taylor, 2007; Gunnlaugson, 2008; Snyder, 2008; Cranton & Taylor, 2012; Newman, 2012; Taylor & Snyder, 2012). Thus what has emerged is an expanded (though not an integrated or overarching) framework of the TL theory (Gunnlaugson, 2008; Cranton & Taylor, 2012; Tisdell, 2012).

4.2.2.1 *Lack of the Social*

The adult education community with its heritage of social actions criticises TL as it does not necessarily bring about social actions (see Finger & Asun, 2001; Cranton, 2006). Mezirow's response to that criticism is that TL *paves the way* for social actions. More specifically, he distinguishes between the educational role of TL and broader social mobilisation in such a manner that TL primarily helps people become aware of

oppressive structures and actions and fosters confidence (Brookfield, 2000). This is especially pertinent to the oppressed who developed the sense of being oppressed, since they are likely to need to transform such a sense first before taking social actions (Merriam et al., 2007).

In fact, TL can actually bring about unintended social actions, as several studies on participatory natural resource management in developing country contexts indicate the existence of social actions or change after TL, including action against illegal logging in Kenya (Sinclair et al., 2011), joint and direct marketing of agricultural produce without middlemen, voting in local elections, holding leadership positions in communities and changed gender relationships in Kenya (Duveskog & Friis-Hansen, 2009; Duveskog et al., 2011; Duveskog, 2013). In addition, of more relevance to this study is the finding that after TL, people in Cambodia started questioning their local authority (Marschke & Sinclair, 2009), as happened in Kenya too (Duveskog et al., 2011; Duveskog, 2013).

TL, through reflective discourse with others, also helps to form an alliance with others in relation to collective actions (Merriam et al., 2007). However, in order to bring about social actions in the context of RBA, TL is likely to need to be supplemented with other types of capacity building such as community mobilisation, proposal development and advocacy skills so that people will be equipped with the knowledge and skills necessary for taking social actions.

However, the critical reflection aspect of TL can actually further fortify inactiveness. Revealed power relationships and difficulties in changing them through critical reflection can cause “an energy sapping, radical pessimism concerning the possibility of structural change” (Brookfield, 2000, p. 145). For example, in Kenya, farmers who had increased their agency through their participation in Farmer Field Schools (FFS) felt more powerless after—with their heightened agency—“trying to lobby for change with local authorities on issues such as water access and complaints of corruption and then realising to what extent their views were ignored by the system, thereby engendering a feeling of helplessness” (Duveskog & Friis-Hansen, 2009, p. 248). Therefore, Brookfield (2000) underscores the importance of reflective discourse, which provides peer support and fosters solidarity towards social actions.

Related to the lack of social actions in TL theorising is the more fundamental problem of the general lack of the social in TL theorising. Several authors (for instance,

Brookfield, 2000; Gunnlaugson, 2008; Cranton & Taylor, 2012; Taylor & Snyder, 2012) maintain that a more accentuated and rigorous engagement between the personal and the social needs to be done in empirical research. Cranton and Taylor (2012) contend that:

Transformative learning theory need not be about individual transformation *or* social change; it is about both. Viewed in this way, this perspective [critical theory—namely the social] is another leg of the elephant—an important leg, without which the elephant would fall down, but nevertheless, a part of the whole. (pp. 9-10, italics original and comments in brackets added).

The existing empirical research is predominantly focused on the personal—the social is just auxiliary—or merely treats the social as a factor that has influenced one’s frame of reference. But from the critical realist perspective, the social, more specifically structures, exist now and are providing people with imminent challenges or enabling factors. And people are reflexive of the existence and power of such structures, and exercise structurally-oriented strategic calculation (Jessop, 2005). Nonetheless, it is indeed a challenge to design a study that rigorously delves into the connection and dynamic interplay between the personal and the social (Merriam & Kim, 2012). Critical realist GT, which is employed in this study, would help in this regard, as it goes beyond people’s perceptions and includes an investigation into structures or generative mechanisms.

As mentioned in Cranton’s (2012) quotation above, critical theory, which critiques dominant ideologies toward social actions and changes (Brookfield, 2012), would help in theorising the social, and in fact some scholars (for example, Ettling, 2012; Tisdell, 2012) consider adult learning based on critical theory as one of the schools of thought in the TL framework. In particular, Paulo Freire’s “conscientisation” and “praxis” are pertinent in this regard. Conscientisation is the process where reality and social conditions are analysed dialogically and critically, thereby revealing dehumanising and oppressive structures (Freire, 1970). Indeed, Mezirow’s TL theory is influenced by Freire’s work (Kitchenham, 2008) and thus TL has an affinity with this conscientisation process in the sense that they both critically assess taken-for-granted frames of references or predominant ideologies (Mayo, 1999). Praxis, on the other hand, is the process whereby people iteratively take actions and reflect on reality and social conditions in order to transform them (Freire, 1970). In order to generate such a process,

educators, by trusting people's potential, need to employ an emancipatory pedagogical approach based on dialogue rather than the banking approach based on didactic and top-down knowledge transfer (Freire, 1970). As the practice of dialogue indicates, Freire emphasises the collective dimension of learning, as "it is collectively that people not only solve problems but, moreover, transform their sociopolitical conditions" (Finger & Asun, 2001, p. 86). I see that in RBA the Freirean approach can complement TL, which focuses on individuals and personal transformation, by adding the dimensions of social change and collective learning and actions. Conversely, TL, which elucidates how perspective transformation occurs in an in-depth manner, can complement the Freirean approach that sketches out the broader pictures of conscientisation and praxis.

However, the Freirean approach may not necessarily generate the intended outcomes, since its success "depends on the skilful facilitation of group discussions about complex social issues with people who are not accustomed to such conversations" (Miller et al., 2005a, p. 54). In addition, the revolutionary and radical nature of his approach may not be congruent with local cultures, or may even be invasive to them (Bowers, 2005), as for instance, in the local expressions of rights reminiscent of Scott's (1985) "Weapons of the Weak":

...peasants' unwillingness to engage overtly in politics may be due to an implicit analysis of risk and power and not just to internalised attitudes of subordination. Instead of direct action, peasants may opt to resist oppression quietly. (Miller et al., 2005a, p. 54).

However, Finger and Asun (2001) refute this cultural invasion claim against Freire, though by reasoning:

...praxis is not a revolutionary seizure of power from the oppressors. Rather, it is a peaceful intervention in order to develop alternatives [through dialoguing with the oppressors]. (p. 84, comments in brackets added).

Thus the approach of the Society for the Promotion of Area Resource Centres (SPARC), which presents development alternatives to Indian government institutions in a non-confrontational manner, as mentioned in Chapter three, fits well in this interpretation of the Freirean approach.

Another criticism of Freire is that the process from theoretical discourse to practical actions, particularly how conscientisation and praxis bring about social change, is not clear enough or is not well delineated (Clare, 2006). Here Mayo (1999) suggests bringing in Antonio Gramsci's political analysis and strategy to fill this gap:

Gramsci's more extensive analysis, in terms of power relations in the wider context, complements Freire's remarkable insights into the power dynamics that lie at the heart of pedagogical encounters. (p. 126).

Figure 3 below shows the theoretical continuum between personal transformation and social transformation. TL primarily addresses personal transformation, whilst the Freirean approach helps theorise the interface between personal and social transformation. Finally, Gramscian thought provides a theoretical foothold for wider social transformation, as will be unpacked below.

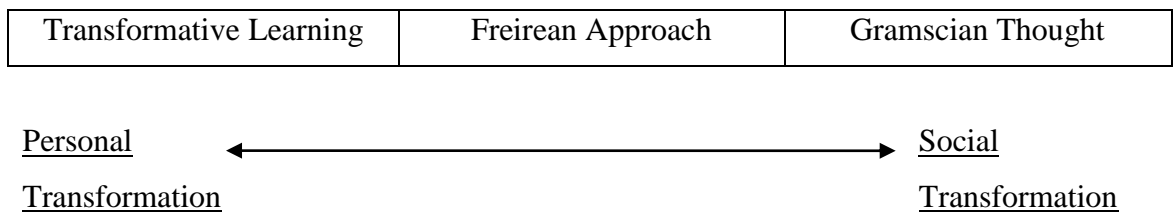


Figure 3: Theoretical Continuum between Personal Transformation and Social Transformation

Source: Author

Specifically, Gramsci invented the notion of “consensual domination” based on his observation of “the failure of a revolutionary mass workers’ movement and the rise of a reactionary fascism supported by much of the working class” in Italy in the 1920s (Carnoy, 1984, p. 65). By modifying the Marxist notion of hegemony based on economic dominance to the ideological dominance of the values and norms of the ruling class over those of the ruled (Carnoy, 1984), Gramsci “demonstrated that a dominant class, in order to maintain its supremacy, must succeed in presenting its own moral, political and cultural values as societal norms; thereby constructing an ideologically-engendered *common sense*” (Hay, 2006, p. 69, italics original). In particular, the dominant classes may employ the “passive revolution,” the acceptance of

certain demands of citizens to prevent their hegemony from being challenged (Sassoon, 1982). In order to counter such subtle tactics to manipulate the citizens' mindset, citizens need to engage in the "war of position," a battle at the level of consciousness and perception rather than the "war of maneuver" or the frontal attack on government (Carnoy, 1984; Hay, 2006). Gramsci (1971) states:

A social group can, and indeed must, already exercise 'leadership' (i.e. be hegemonic) before winning governmental power (this indeed is one of the principal conditions for the winning of such power). (p. 207).

Mass conscious transformation with counter-hegemony will gradually surround government and eventually take over just as the phrase "the war of position", indicates—"trenches moving back and forth in an ideological struggle over the consciousness of the working class" (Carnoy, 1984, p. 82) or of the citizens. This implies that citizens need to transform their perspectives (that is, TL) first, as the pre-condition for social changes. For such perspective transformation, citizens need to "recognise how dominant ideology is inscribed within them and...how this ideology shapes, or perhaps more accurately circumscribes, their individual choices, decisions, and actions" (Brookfield, 2012, p. 139), namely conscientisation.

4.2.2.2 Unrealistic Preconditions and the Role of Critical Realist View of Agency

The TL theory has, moreover, been critiqued for demanding the preconditions in which TL is likely to occur. Mezirow (2000) sets a rather high standard for such preconditions, particularly for participation in reflective discourse, including:

...elements of maturity, education, safety, health, economic security, and emotional intelligence. Hungry, homeless, desperate, threatened, sick, or frightened adults are less likely to be able to participate effectively in discourse. (pp. 15-16).

Mezirow (2003) explains that age and education matter for critical reflection, and Merriam (2004), through reviewing empirical research, identifies TL, in particular critical reflection and reflective discourse, as being likely to require a certain cognitive maturity, which can be developed by education and through age progression.

Mezirow (2003) also points out that reflective discourse requires mutual agreements and understanding, which can easily be distorted by power relationships and

cultural inequality. Brookfield (2000) elaborates this concern from the perspective of critical theory:

...forces present in the wider society always intrude into our work with learners. We come to see that adult education classrooms are not limpid, tranquil eddies cut off from the river of social, cultural, and political life. (pp. 136-137).

Such forces in society have been confirmed by the review work on empirical studies by Merriam et al. (2007). Therefore, careful and conscious efforts to create a safe and level space for the marginalised and the silenced are needed (Belenky & Stanton, 2000).

Partly against this kind of determinist view of agency supposed in TL on the one hand and partly against the agential and reflexive view of agency paradoxically also implied in TL—as the strong word ‘transformative’ indicates—on the other, there have recently emerged theoretical (Nairn et al., 2012) and empirical (Finnegan, 2011) efforts to situate TL within the more moderate critical realist perspective. Critical realists argue that there exist definite structures or generative mechanisms in the world, as Mezirow himself uses such words as “safety,” “economic security,” “hungry” and “homeless” above. Such structures influence the reflexivity of people (Archer, 2003) and again Mezirow appears to be aware of it as he uses such words as “maturity,” “emotional intelligence,” “threatened” and “frightened” above. On the other hand, although not to the degree to which TL theory supposes, critical realism sees that people as reflexive agents can act against or influence structures or contexts. Archer (2003) argues that people exercise reflexivity in relation to structures and such reflexivity is manifested as an “internal conversation,” in which:

We survey constraints and enablements, under our own description (which is the only way we can know anything); we consult our projects which were deliberately defined to realise our concerns; and we strategically adjust them into those practices which we conclude internally (and always fallibly) will enable us to do (and be) what we care about most in society. (p. 133).

Therefore, Narin et al. (2012) argue that a balance needs to be struck between the emphasis on “the reflexive nature of human actors and how they purposively interact with the world” and the understanding that “change takes place within pre-existing social contexts which may, or may not be conducive to change” (p. 199). In his longitudinal qualitative research on the experience of working class university students

in Ireland, Finnegan (2011) finds that “both the limits and possibilities of critical reflection often have...a relationship to social inequality” and, like Narin et al. (2012), concludes that researchers “have to work between the forces of social reproduction and the hidden potential for transformative learning” (p. 86). So the important aspect of the inquiry should be the extent to which, in Cambodia, structures have exercised the powers of constraint over people’s reflexivity and the extent to which they have been able to exercise reflexivity against such powers in relation to claiming their rights from duty-bearers.

Likewise, both Freire and Gramsci optimistically view people as agential in being able to understand their oppressed situations and to be engaged in countering such state of being dominated (Burawoy, 2014). In other words, they seem to underestimate the power of structures over people’s exercise of agency. Hence, here too adding the critical realist view of agency as reflexivity in relation to structures (Archer, 2003) to their notion of conscientisation appears to help better elucidate how the oppressive context of Cambodia influences people’s agency in claiming their rights.

4.2.2.3 Rational and Collective Dimensions of Transformative Learning

Next, the TL theory has been critiqued for being too rational, as manifested in its emphasis on critical reflection (for example, Merriam et al., 2007). The roles of intuition, emotion, imagination and spirituality have not been included in Mezirow’s original theorisation of TL. However, it has been recognised that TL happens without critical reflection. For example, Belenky and Stanton (2000) point out “connected knowing” whereby women “try to enter into the other person’s perspective, adopting their frame of mind, trying to see the world through their eyes” and “[s]triving to get the big picture, they try to see things holistically, not analytically” (p. 87).

Taylor (2001) and Diaz (2009) point out that emotion and rationality are interdependent, or act in concert with each other. In particular, Fetherston and Kelly (2007) and Berger (2004) give importance to emotional support for people in dealing with disorienting dilemmas. In a similar vein, the relational aspect of TL should be emphasised. Authentic and trusting supportive relationships among peers and with teachers (Taylor, 2001; Cranton, 2006; Merriam et al., 2007; Taylor, 2009; Taylor & Snyder, 2012) and social recognition (Nohl, 2009) foster TL.

The collective dimension of TL, which has been tangentially touched upon thus far, is especially salient in studies on participatory natural resource management (Diduck et al., 2012), and particularly pertinent to reflective discourse and communicative learning. Interestingly, Bridwell (2013) and Wilhelmson (2006) infer, based on their empirical research, that the preconditions (Mezirow, 2000) and cognitive maturity (Merriam, 2004) required for TL, which are hard to find among the marginalised, may be addressed by such spaces for dialogue and relationships whereby participants are enabled to take part and support each other. On the other hand, Cranton's (2012) and Newman's (2010) critical assessment is that it is quite difficult to generate such an ideal dialogue environment in reality, due to, for example, distrust and inequality among participants.

4.2.2.4 Contexts Matter

Whilst more recent pieces of research have been investigating the contexts in which TL occurs, and indicating their importance (Merriam et al., 2007; Taylor, 2007; Snyder, 2008), there is still little research on TL in non-formal education settings and the roles of culture in TL (Taylor, 2007; Taylor & Snyder, 2012). In the latter, there is limited empirical research on TL outside the western contexts (Taylor, 2007). Even among such studies, only a few are critical of the cultural influences on TL (Taylor & Snyder, 2012). Marschke and Sinclair (2009), Affolter et al. (2009), Madsen (2010), Sinclair et al. (2011) and Sinclair et al. (2013) all mention that TL occurs in the contexts of Cambodia, Afghanistan, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Kenya and Thailand respectively, without addressing any cultural influence on TL.

In contrast, Sims and Sinclair (2008), Merriam and Ntseane (2008), Duveskog et al. (2011), and Duveskog (2013) are more critical of the western, rational and cognitive nature of TL and cultural influences on TL. For example, in their research in the East African countries, Duveskog et al. (2011) and Duveskog (2013) identify collective learning and changes, which provide peer support for new behaviours acquired through FFS, as being more in tune with collective rural societies where one's behaviour is closely monitored by other residents, than enhanced autonomy and self-directedness, which are emphasised in western TL studies.

4.3 Conclusion

In order to fulfill a wide spectrum of human rights, RBA generally aims at empowering the community of rights-holders (generally citizens) to claim their rights from duty-bearers (in many cases, governments), whilst it aims at supporting, developing and lobbying duty-bearers to be more responsive and accountable to such demands from rights-holders (Cornwall & Nyamu-Musembi, 2004). RBA has been re-packaged as one of the international human rights discourses in the West. In particular the confrontational kind of approach that is normally entailed by the western discourse of RBA is difficult to implement under the often authoritarian governments of developing countries, hence the call for a non-confrontational approach. Finally, the middle-ground RBA, which engages with local government, has synergic relationships with decentralisation reforms.

TL has pertinence to RBA as it has the potential to foster people's agency in order to claim their rights under oppressive contexts. The core process of TL is perspective transformation, which Mezirow argues can happen through critical reflection on experiences through dialogue. However, because of increasing critiques of the TL theory, its theoretical framework has been expanding. One such critique is the lack of the social in terms of resultant social actions as well as TL theorising. I presented the view that the Freirean pedagogical approach as well as Gramsci's political analysis and strategy can fill this practical and theoretical lack of the social in the TL theory. Another critique is the unrealistic preconditions for TL. This led me to look at the role of the critical realist's moderate view of agency in order to more realistically and modestly consider the rather agential theorising of TL. The TL theory has also been criticised for being too rational and for its disregard for the roles of emotions and relationships. Moreover, the collective process of TL, which is relevant to reflective discourse and communicative learning, has been gaining attention and may compensate for the lack of the preconditions mentioned above through the provision of spaces for dialogue and relationships. Finally, the role of contexts for TL in terms of the forms of education and cultural differences has not been emphasised and thus TL research in the under-researched contexts is needed.

Given the general lack of the social in TL research, the analytical chapters that follow will have an unconventional sequence, as I will first attempt, in Chapter five, to examine how TL occurs in terms of the dynamic interplay between citizens and

Cambodia's decentralisation process rather than how TL occurs at a more micro and intra-personal level, which is normally the focus of TL research. This is to put the social in the foreground of this study in line with critical realism. Then in Chapter six I will focus on 'the personal' dimension of TL in terms of citizens' confidence and capacity development. Finally, in Chapter seven I will come back to the social by analysing how such confidence and capacity development attempts work out in the particular context of land grabbing, a more difficult structure for TL to occur in, due to the convergence of the interests of the powerful there.

Chapter 5: Decentralisation and Rights to Development

5.1 Introduction

This chapter seeks to understand the process in which LWD has influenced the agency of its project participants (PPs) in fulfilling their rights to development in the context of the dynamic interplay between their agency and decentralised governance. To begin with, I will provide the contextual background to Cambodia's decentralisation reforms. I will then delve into the conflicting co-existence between the process-oriented approach and the results-oriented and donor-driven approach within LWD's operation. Following that, the ways in which LWD has used the service-delivery approach (SDA) to achieve rights-based goals will be examined. Next, I will look into the impacts of human rights dissemination by LWD and LWD's strategy for dealing with rights issues. After that, I will critique the village-commune participatory planning as a core process of people's claiming their rights to development. Finally, I will investigate LWD's strategy to work with commune councils (CCs) and problematise the neo-patrimonial practice that has obstructed the just distribution of the Community Sangkat Fund (CSF) to people.

At the core of my argument is that LWD's intervention, which has further widened the democratic spaces made available through decentralisation by working closely with CCs and which has empowered citizens in a multi-faceted manner including cognitive, legal and material empowerment, has gradually enabled citizens to grapple with CCs so as to claim their rights to development. However, it appears that LWD has not penetrated into the neo-patrimonial generative mechanisms behind the decentralisation reforms, and so has not conscientised citizens about these mechanisms.

From here on, I will use sub-headings (except for the background of Cambodia's decentralisation) to indicate categories, which have emerged as a result of grounded theory (GT) analysis¹⁹. I will do the same for Chapters six and seven.

¹⁹ The category diagrams, on which my writing of the analytical chapters is based and which show the overall moves or directions of the processes in question, can be found in Appendices 5, 6 and 7.

5.2 Background of Cambodia's Decentralisation Reforms

5.2.1 Historical Background and Political Motives

Despite the introduction of liberal democracy as a political system in the early 1990s, many of the actual political practices of the Cambodian government are still characterised as authoritarian and neo-patrimonial. Hence, more accurately the Cambodian government is politically hybrid, or in the 'grey area' between democracy and traditional political practice (Heng et al., 2011). Thus it should be stressed that rather than being motivated by democratic intentions, the decentralisation reforms in Cambodia were implemented primarily to increase the credibility and legitimacy of the ruling political party, the Cambodian People's Party (CPP) (Manor, 1999; Blunt & Turner, 2005; Plummer & Tritt, 2012). It was the legacy of conflicts that partly contributed to the lack of the credibility and popularity of local authorities:

During the Khmer Rouge rule of the 1970s, local authorities were often deadly enforcers of central dictates and policies. While everyday life returned to something more recognisably normal during the 1980s, local authorities continued to play a key role in disciplining the local population on behalf of the state. Commune and village committees and chiefs had to be particularly 'thick-faced' (in the Khmer [Cambodian] vernacular) as they were required to conscript men and send them into military service or to construct border defences in the malaria-ridden forests on the Thai-Cambodian border...the experiences of conscription and militarisation left many local authorities lacking in popularity and legitimacy. (Plummer & Tritt, 2012, pp. 16-17, comments in brackets added).

As a post-conflict state, Blunt and Turner (2005) categorise Cambodia as an extreme case, in which decentralisation efforts had to be confronted with the vanishing of government institutions and civil servants due to the Khmer Rouge regime and the subsequent centralised-governance following the socialist regime of Vietnam that 'liberated' Cambodia from the Khmer Rouge.

The Cambodian government launched the SEILA²⁰ programme, funded by international donors, which evolved from the UN's reintegration programme for refugees and Internally Displaced Persons in the early 1990s, in order to pilot decentralised governance (Heng et al., 2011). The success of SEILA had given a promising prospect for development and thus persuaded policy-makers to implement the

²⁰ SEILA means 'foundation stone' in Cambodian (Heng et al., 2011).

decentralisation reforms as a priority policy (Heng et al., 2011). Part of the political and strategic consideration of the government was to seek more funding from international donors by implementing the decentralisation reforms (Manor, 1999; Blunt & Turner, 2005) and the centralised Cambodian government had no strong intent to drastically decentralise its governance system (Blunt & Turner, 2005).

5.2.2 Current State of the Decentralisation Reforms

In spite of the lack of government's strong will to drastically decentralise its governance, the reforms ended up bringing more participative and democratic space (Spyckerelle & Morrison, 2007; Öjendal & Sedara, 2011). As a result, the mental distance between villagers and CCs, which used to be characterised by fear, has been shortened (Öjendal & Sedara, 2006; Öjendal & Sedara, 2011). Even in the mid-2000s, Öjendal and Sedara (2006) found that "the decentralisation reform...has sparked agency, and the structural impediments to individual actions are less totalitarian and less punishing" (p. 526). Recently, Öjendal and Sedara (2011) conducted two large surveys, which were longitudinally implemented around two separate commune elections (2005 and 2008/9), and complementary qualitative fieldwork in five provinces. I was able to use the findings for the proxy baseline—meaning the general context of rural Cambodia. From the villagers' perspective:

Almost 96% (up from 87% in 2005) now think that the commune councillors respect ordinary citizens, and 81% (up from 55% in 2005) believe that commune councillors (CCs) generally manage to solve conflicts in the villages. More than 91% (92% in 2005) claim that general complaints are taken seriously by local authorities and an astonishing 99% (up from 61%) say that they would turn to the commune authorities if they had a serious problem. (Öjendal & Sedara, 2011, p. 5).

In the domain of people's rights to development, or more specifically, their entitlement to CSF, there are also positive trends where people feel freer to claim such rights from CCs. From the villagers' perspective:

...90% believe that 'villagers' had been crucial in formulating it [Commune Development Plan (CDP²¹)] (compared to 83% 2005). Interestingly, 37% claim that they have actually voiced demands directly to the commune council(lors)

²¹ The CDP is made by CCs with participation by village representatives in order to utilise CSF.

(up from 26%), and in this group 87% (68% in 2005) believe that their concerns have been taken into consideration by the council. (Öjendal & Sedara, 2011, p. 5, comments in brackets added).

It is noteworthy that people have started perceiving that their electoral power for commune elections does make a difference, and “people as well as the authorities are becoming increasingly accustomed to the rules of the democratic game” (Öjendal & Sedara, 2011, p. 14). As a result:

...97% believe that if the council does not do a satisfactory job, it can be replaced at the next election (up from 91 in 2005). ‘Only’ 10%, down from 22% in 2005, say that they are afraid to voice their opinion. (Öjendal & Sedara, 2011, p. 7).

Although commune councillors are predominantly affiliated with the CPP and thus hold double accountabilities not only to citizens but also to their political party, there appears to be a shift of their accountability more towards citizens: “both the villagers and the councillors believe that it is primarily the voters (70%) that have the power to oust the CC (no data from 2005), while 18% believe it is the party” (Öjendal & Sedara, 2011, p. 12).

However, the citizens’ realisation about their electoral power was not really reflected in the 2012 CC election. The dominance by the CPP in CC seats—62% of votes (Women's Media Centre of Cambodia, n.d.) and 97% of commune chief positions (Un, 2013)—did not change. One of the chief reasons for the victory of CCP is the use of CSF to meet the local (primarily infrastructural) needs together with the CPP’s party financing system through its patronage networks for again local infrastructural development (Un, 2013), which I will further analyse later in this chapter. From the following section on, the result of GT analysis will be presented.

5.3 A Closer Relationship with Local Government

Through the Venn diagram exercise during the focus group (FG) sessions I facilitated PPs to visualise how they perceived CCs and district offices (DOs) in 2005, 2008/2009²² and 2011 respectively. All the FGs showed the trends similar to the one

²² I originally planned to use 2008 as it was medium between 2005 and 2011. However, since economic land concessionaries launched their operation since 2009 in one of the research sites, I used 2009 for the Venn diagram exercise for that site.

shown in Photo 2 (from the second research site). In the photo, from the right, the flipcharts indicate 2005, 2008 and 2011. The coloured circles represent the village (green), the CC (pink) and the DO (yellow).



Photo 2: Venn Diagram Results from the Second Research Site

In general, not only has the citizens' mental distance with local government (CCs and DOs) been shortened in recent years, as indicated by the decreasing distance they put between their village and local government, but also their perceived status of themselves in comparison with local government has grown, as indicated by the increasingly larger size of their village. As a result, the PPs were enabled to claim their rights to development. One of the former village development committee (VDC) members said:

If there is any problem [???]²³ can communicate with the CC. It is very close today, not afraid of the CC and the DO [???] If we want to do something

²³ [???] indicates parts of the interview that the transcribers could not understand, whilst three consecutive dots indicate parts of the interview that are not relevant to the information that I was extracting, as they were mostly a repetition of what interviewees had said previously (Bryman, 2008).

regarding development in the village, we in the community will contact the CC and the CC will contact the DO...The members are very brave now, not afraid like before. If a problem can be solved in the village, it will be solved in the village, but if it is not, it will be sent to the CC and to the DO...For example, we want to have roads or what [??] we plan to contact the CC and the DO. That is the rights of my village (FG, Sophol Inn 1).

Below I will unpack how such mental closeness came about as the combined outcome of the more democratic spaces created through decentralisation and LWD's efforts to further widen such spaces and to enhance people's agency.

5.4 Capacity and Confidence Building

LWD has been building the confidence and capacities of its PPs as individuals and as a collective in their move towards claiming rights to development from local government. The detailed analysis of the confidence and capacity development is the topic for Chapter six.

5.5 Process-oriented Approach vs. Result-oriented and Donor-driven Approach

Paradoxically, LWD's activities are process-oriented on the one hand, yet at the same time result-oriented and donor-driven. For the process-oriented nature, the sample Community Empowerment Facilitator (CEF) with high capacities and the programme support staff exhibited such dialogical and interactive processes as posing questions, probing, giving enough space for PPs to discuss among themselves—when those staff facilitated meetings and training sessions—and coaching individual PPs. In addition, the training unit as well as programme support unit staff had high-level skills of facilitation such as the participatory rural appraisal (PRA), the use of visual images for stimulating discussion, group works and exercises, and participatory decision-making. In East Africa, one of the crucial elements for the successful TL experiences in farmer field schools (FFSs) was facilitation by trained facilitators (Duveskog, 2013). LWD implemented strict quality control, especially for the training capacities of training and programme support staff through such ways as on-site observation and coaching by senior training officers. LWD's RBA manual emphasises that “[a]ccountability is not only a concern for the outcome of development, but also for

the *process* by which it is achieved” (Lutheran World Federation Cambodia, 2009, p. 19, italics original).

On the other hand, the result-oriented nature of LWD activities together with its donor-driven nature (which are actually antithetical to its process-oriented approach, as will be shown below) are embodied in LWD’s detailed and complex financial reporting requirements as well as in its detailed, favourable and timely project reports for donors.

The detailed and complex financial reporting requirements were especially salient in Village Partnership Projects (VPPs), implemented in both research sites. The aim of VPPs is to let PPs experience the whole project process of planning, implementation and evaluation by disbursing funds for a certain project (such as road and dam construction) so that their confidence and capacities to write proposals for such projects and manage them would be enhanced. However, CEFs and VDC members actually spent quite some time preparing detailed and complex proposals and reports. The recent localisation of LWD seems to have been furthering this impetus. The external evaluation recommended establishing newly localised LWD’s reputation over the next few years (Cossar, 2011) and hence LWD’s most recent long-range plan emphasises:

Maintaining and strengthening relations with existing Related Agencies will be a priority of LWD’s resource mobilisation plan. This will be accomplished by ensuring good programme quality, transparent and accountable financial management as well as appropriate and timely correspondence to donors. (Life with Dignity, 2011a, p. 23).

Detailed, favourable and timely project reports for donors were observed in the work of CEFs and Community Empowerment Officers (CEOs) in both programme sites. When the CEFs were conducting a commune-level quarterly monitoring meeting, in which village representatives were to learn from each other and LWD was to collect information to report to its donors, those CEFs were very frustrated by the fact that participants could not express their development results for the last three months in SMART (specific, measureable, achievable, relevant, and time-bounded) terms—the common reporting criteria for donors in the development industry. In addition, in one of the team meetings between a CEO and CEFs, the CEO told his CEF that they *needed to show good work for visitors from the donor*.

I repeatedly observed that CEFs and CEOs were discussing the deadlines of various project activities. For example, in the organisational reflective workshop held at one of the programme sites, the facilitator of the workshop said that if reports to donors were late, they might not fund LWD anymore. He went on to say:

Funds may be directed towards Africa. We are responsible for the poor; they may not be able to send their children to school. Funding depends on all of us. If we are given one million US dollars, but we do not make reports, then we will miss the opportunity. Thus we need to follow the system (Field notes, 12 July 2012).

According to its long-range plan, LWD is concerned about the donors' lack of understanding of its integrated and rights-based approach, due to their tendency to favour traditional sectoral projects (such as health and education) (Life with Dignity, 2011a), which basically fall within SDA and are likely to be result-oriented. This preference by donors might have been reflected in or filtered down to LWD's emphasis on service-delivery and result-oriented operation. This donor-driven nature or the asymmetrical power relationship between donors and NGOs deriving primarily from the financial power of donors has been well-documented in NGO literature (for example, Kimura, 2010).

It is worth pointing out here that I found attitudes of dependency on LWD's assistance among PPs in the first research site where a considerable amount of material input was still needed, due to the devastation even after more than a decade since conflict had ceased—as in the case of the participant observation of the FFS meeting, where the participants listed all kinds of needs (Box 1 in Chapter three). Such attitudes were also found in the poorest PPs in the second research site. LWD identifies the poorest population in each village—they call them 'Partner Households'—and gives special assistance to them following the rights-based rationale that everyone has rights to development and no one should be excluded from its fulfilment.

5.6 Filling the 'Development Gap'

Speaking of LWD's continued emphasis on service-delivery, its staff from the all the organisational levels thought that LWD's development work was to fill the 'development gap' created by the vast lack of local government social services. The way in which such work was implemented was developmental; namely, not

handout-type activities that could create dependency, and hence LWD enabled PPs not to rely solely on LWD for inputs for their development in both research sites. PPs were encouraged to provide what they could contribute toward particular development activities, and also to augment the initial inputs given by LWD; for instance, regenerating vegetable seeds for the next round of cultivation, using interest from a savings group for repairing a community well, and utilising the fund balance from a particular activity with further local contribution toward another activity. Related to this, LWD encouraged PPs in both research sites not to depend on outside sources of income. One such discourse is to use the development opportunities offered by LWD. For example, through FFSs, they can learn to grow enough vegetables (Cossar, 2011) or through agricultural cooperatives, they can share in the profits. As a result, they do not have to go outside their villages to earn an income by cutting trees, which would cause deforestation, or by working in factories, through which they could only earn meagre wages. Nevertheless, a dependency attitude was observed among some PPs, as discussed above.

In addition, there seems to be a consensual understanding among LWD staff where people's basic needs have to be met as RBA is implemented. As mentioned in Chapter four, the extent to which SDA is implemented depends on the economic space of the local context. The areas in which LWD is operating are resource-starved and thus there is considered to be a large economic space for SDA. Harris-Curtis et al. (2005) mention that it might be more beneficial not to bring RBA into the foreground in a context where the notion of human rights is alien and resources are scarce. Good NGO practices have been recently reported from some fields: for example, (a) Save the Children Fiji (a field office of an international NGO) has a 'playground van' for squatter communities through which whilst children learn and parents are trained in health and education—namely, the fulfillment of their needs—parents are also encouraged to discuss child rights (Llewellyn-Fowler & Overton, 2010); (b) CARE Rwanda (a field office of an international NGO) has a project that combines children's education with income-generation to ensure the sustainable fulfillment of their rights to education (Pells, 2012). Indeed the assessment by the external evaluator of LWD is that:

[LWD's] Integrated Approach is *respectful of the needs of the community* by providing hardware (as reportedly some NGOs only provide software) and uses the Rights-Based, Participatory, Community and Empowerment approaches to

achieve more sustainable results. (Cossar, 2011, pp. 17-18, comments in brackets and italics added but comments in parentheses original).

Furthermore, LWD staff in both programme sites claimed that a certain level of economic development was necessary prior to people claiming their rights. One of the CEOs stated:

We want these groups [community-based organisations (CBOs)] to be strong and sustainable. We create and make those groups have incomes. It means it is done through establishing savings groups or bank groups for them to have a better life. When they have a better life, their rights-claiming starts working as well. In other words, if their life is not better, they are not interested in claiming their rights because they [have to] find immediate needs. It means that they have to go to forests and so do not participate [in rights-claiming] (Interview, Rottanak Kim, comments in brackets added).

LWD's developmental approach, which is aimed at the PPs' economic self-reliance mentioned earlier, plays a key role in this regard. According to Heang (2011), there are a few pieces of research indicating that poverty makes citizens spend more time earning a livelihood rather than participating in commune and village meetings for prioritising development activities to gain CSF; that is, engaging with CCs to fulfil their rights to development. Mezirow (2000) identifies the physical-material preconditions for TL, especially reflective discourse, to occur. Such preconditions include health and economic security, and thus, as stated earlier, "[h]ungry, homeless, desperate...adults are less likely to be able to participate effectively in discourse" (Mezirow, 2000, pp. 15-16). From this perspective, it makes sense that before or as people embark on TL in their move toward claiming their rights, their immediate and minimal needs have to be met. In fact, a study on FFS in East Africa by Duveskog et al. (2011) and Duveskog (2013) indicates that in resource-starved rural areas, the transformation of farmers' perspective of enhanced agency needs to occur simultaneously with their economic and physical improvement through the instrumental learning of new agricultural techniques. In other words, their perspective transformation hinges on their capacity development and resultant improved wellbeing.

There were claims from numerous PPs and LWD staff at the various organisational levels that people achieved their rights to development through LWD's service delivery. One of the CEOs said that providing health centre buildings, school buildings and roads was to achieve people's social rights (Interview, Rottanak Kim).

Similarly, a few LWD staff from the CEF as well as senior management levels claimed that RBA was primarily and ultimately the priority for LWD. As just mentioned, one such logic is that LWD's service delivery fulfils certain rights of people. The other one is that SDA, by being combined with RBA in a mutually reinforcing manner, can contribute to the fulfilment of people's rights. For example, one of the LWD's senior staff stated:

We see it [SDA] as an entry point for rights-based empowerment. Why? Because for example in our approach, when we have found budget or resource to construct schools, we engage with the government and inform them about that, but we also bind them in the agreement in which they need to provide teachers and teaching materials to run the school, so with that, you can see how you can influence the government to provide services to the people (Interview, Sophat Um 2, comments in brackets added).

Hence LWD accepts "a gradual realisation of rights in accordance with the resources and institutional capacity available" of local government (Friis-Hansen & Kyed, 2009, p. 16). In a similar vein, CARE Rwanda combines its short-term 'technical' activities with other efforts designed to enable them to contribute to long-term rights-based goals:

CARE's rights-based response to HIV/AIDS extends, through community mapping and action planning and the use of popular theatre and radio, to community awareness raising and dialogue on the conditions and expressed demands of PLWHA [people living with HIV/AIDS], widows and orphans and, through strengthening paralegal capacities and outreach, to the provision of legal aid services for those who have suffered abuses. (Jones, 2005, p. 88, comments in brackets added).

5.7 Human Rights Dissemination by LWD

The PPs' increased understanding of human rights plays a significant role in their confidence development for dealing with local government and thus has been helping to shorten their mental distance from CCs and DOs. As mentioned, through the Venn diagram during the FGs sessions it was revealed that over the years, the PPs' mental distance from CCs has generally been reduced. One of the FG participants said:

In 2005 people were afraid [of the CC and the DO] but in 2009 people understood clearly about equal rights whether it has to do with the CC or the DO. People understood and knew [equal rights] so it [the village] was moved closer

[to the CC and the DO] [??] If there is a matter, the village will communicate to the commune office to solve that matter...Members in my community understood [equal rights] because LWD has come to train us to respect each other [??] from the law (FG, Sophol Inn 1, comments in brackets added).

It was not just LWD but also local government (mostly CCs) that disseminated human rights to PPs. However, CCs' rights dissemination was considerably smaller than LWD's, according to the commune chiefs in both research sites (Interviews, Polo Pak; Vothol Mao). Hence, a few LWD staff stated that there was a 'human rights gap' on the ground—among the rural population—where there was not a thorough dissemination of human rights by local government, nor could the illiterate read the written notices of human rights by government, nor could the poor afford TV or radio through which they could hear about human rights. Thus LWD's dissemination of human rights is to fill this 'human rights gap.'

5.8 LWD's Strategy for Dealing with Rights Issues

From some hard lessons especially with government, LWD had sensibly been formulating its strategy for dealing with rights issues. In the very early stage of its adoption of RBA, LWD was faced with a major clash with the government:

The crisis that erupted this year [2006] was over land rights. In the area of IRDEP Oral [one of LWF's programme sites], several villagers were arrested. LWF Cambodia was blamed for inciting people to oppose the local authorities. Work and collegial relationships between LWF Cambodia and local government staff were strained. Intervention by the staff of the Phnom Penh office with the local authorities, aided by Mr. Yash Ghai, the UN Secretary General's Special Representative for Human Rights in Cambodia, highlighted the plight of those arrested. Their situation was publicised and they were eventually released. Follow-up included court hearings, which LWF Cambodia staff attended as observers. (Busch, 2008, p. 99, comments in brackets added).

The government is sensitive to human rights issues and thus it is risky and difficult for NGOs like LWD to advocate on behalf of people.

Such an event has made LWD formulate its strategy to only show PPs some ways to deal with rights issues and to let them make their own decisions and actions rather than to be directly involved, for instance, in advocacy on their behalf. More specifically, in such rights issues as requesting development projects from CCs, land grabbing, domestic violence (DV), and quarrels among villagers, LWD only shows

them to whom they should report—for instance, village leaders, VDCs, CCs, police and human rights NGOs (namely, state and non-state duty-bearers)—and instructs them how to write petition letters. Kawamura (2008) argues that through the adoption of RBA, development organisations need to consider their stance with different stakeholders more seriously than when they simply implement development activities. More specifically, the more risky the activities are, the more important it is for rights-holders themselves to make decisions about taking such risks (Kawamura, 2008). Moreover, if LWD advocates on behalf of its PPs, that raises “issues of how adequately the interests of the community are being represented and whether NGOs’ own agendas are always consistent with the community’s needs” (Newell, 2006, p. 177). This is particularly so as most LWD staff are not native to programme sites.

Another principle that LWD uses for dealing with rights issues is that LWD promotes peaceful advocacy through non-violent words and deeds. One of the senior LWD staff explained:

The way we are working is just to call everyone to come to the table, we are not trying to confront people, and we see a lot of positive responses and results, because we are trying, avoiding to create the conflict among the people, we are trying to harmonise people to be responsive (Interview, Tinekor Meas).

5.9 Village-Commune Participatory Planning

Villages claim their rights to development by a CC by submitting a development project proposal. Its process starts with participatory decision-making by villagers with the aim of prioritising projects to be submitted to a CC. Through such discussion and prioritisation, villagers formulate a proposal. Finally, a proposal is sent through a village leader or a VDC to a CC.

As mentioned briefly, the Venn diagram exercises as well as individual interviews with PPs reveal that their mental distance with the CCs has been reduced over the last several years. Yet if their roles and positions in their CBOs do not require them to have regular contact with a CC, there is still a mental gap between them and a CC. A VDC member, who was not so active in VDC work, as she was busy with farming and child-rearing, told of her involvement in requesting a road from the CC:

Research Assistant: How was your feeling? Did you feel confident in requesting that road from the CC? Or you were afraid to make a request to them? Your own feeling?

Respondent: I dared not request. Until they, for example, someone like the village leader, worked on that; they directly made a request.

Research Assistant: Why didn't you dare to make a request?

Respondent: I don't meet [the CC] very often in meetings. When the CC asked us what we wanted, we then told them loudly and so I dared. Generally speaking though, I have never met them personally. They just came to attend the meeting at the big hall [the nearby Buddhist temple] and so I met them (Interview, Chantou Norn, comments in brackets added).

Village leaders appointed by CCs function as formal and informal 'gatekeepers' between villagers and CCs (Plummer & Tritt, 2012). For LWD programme sites, active VDC members also appeared to play the same role. Thus, most of the villagers need to put forward their desired use of CSF at village level meetings rather than doing so at commune level meetings (Plummer & Tritt, 2012). However, the decision to receive CSF for a particular year on a rotating basis, due to its limited amount, which will be problematised later in this chapter, is made at the commune level, rendering the village-level discussion somewhat irrelevant and disincentivising (Plummer & Tritt, 2012). Moreover, the social hierarchy does influence the group dynamics, as evidenced by the silence of the female VDC member in the presence of the CC-appointed village leader and deputy village leader during my 'failed' FG interview (in Chapter three). Furthermore, the cultural inhibition of not giving voice publicly because of risk aversion, together with a lack of participatory decision-making skills and the dual accountability (to citizens and the political party) on the side of village leaders, normally make village-level meetings unsubstantial and ineffective (Plummer & Tritt, 2012). This democratic deficit is actually the area in which LWD attempts to build the confidence and capacities of PPs and the capacities of village leaders. Nonetheless, this limited decision-making involvement of people is magnified in the interface between villages and CCs, which local elites such as village leaders and active VDC members dominate, and thus people's lack of confidence and capacities in dealing with local government persist, as in the case of Chatou Norn, a non-active VDC member, quoted above.

Even at the commune level, the officially participatory process appears to be merely a form and to have little substance (Plummer & Tritt, 2012). Just like the case of villages, councillors generally do not possess participatory planning skills and village

representatives tend not to publicly give voice to councillors (Plummer & Tritt, 2012). Moreover, only minor issues are discussed in such open meetings, whilst substantial decisions are made in the ‘closed’ space and villagers’ feedback is channelled through their informal talk with village leaders as informal ‘gatekeepers’ to CCs, which paradoxically guarantees the reflection of popular voices in the decision-making to some degree (Plummer & Tritt, 2012). On the other hand, these are the exact areas in which LWD has been attempting to build the capacities of CCs (facilitation skills and the awareness as duty-bearers), as will be elaborated below, and the confidence and capacities of VDCs to speak out.

5.10 Working with Government in the Context of Decentralisation

Rather than taking a confrontational stance with local government, LWD takes a more collaborative stance through humble engagement and by building local government’s capacities. LWD has provided specific training as well as facilitating the creation of the participatory spaces where the capacities of both the rights-holders and duty-bearers have been increased through their interactions with each other. For example, LWD regularly encourages commune councillors to attend village-level meetings such as VDC meetings and women’s group meetings. One of the senior staff said:

In every village, the CC staff, they come together with our staff to facilitate meetings with community to discuss about the challenges, the problems, and then we prioritise those, then and put them into the village’s annual development plan (Interview, Song Heng).

LWD’s external evaluation report confirms that CCs had increased their capacities to collaborate with villages (Cossar, 2011). In addition, through RBA training, CCs became more aware of their duties and started fulfilling them (Cossar, 2011). One of the CEFs stated:

CCs, duty bearers, received LWD’s training course on rights or the roles of CC, in which they learned that when they were holding the position as a CC, they had to fulfill, they had to work for the citizens without claiming payment or corruption...Before, they thought that when they joined the CC, worked hard and were tired, sometimes they personally demanded the ‘money under the table’ from citizens because they signed for or filled in some forms for citizens. But now it changed a lot (FG, Bourey So).

This kind of paperwork related to citizens' registration is normally done by commune clerks appointed by the Ministry of Interior. According to Plummer and Tritt (2012):

Councils seem to be developing sufficient legitimacy with higher level state hierarchies to be able to hold local officials to account, and sufficient motivation to do so. (p. 9).

Therefore, it can be said that LWD has been reinforcing this process.

I also observed some activities that were specifically intended to build local governance capacities. For example, one of the CCs was involved in a VPP procurement (bidding) process. This is a unique way to involve CCs in LWD's programming in order to enhance their accountability as Box 2 shows below.

Box 2: Village Partnership Project (VPP) to Enhance the Capacities of Villages and the Accountability of CCs

One of the sample CEFs helped another CEF in another commune who had never conducted the procurement (bidding) process for a VPP. This procurement process was for road construction for the five villages in this commune. Present were a CC, including its chief, and VDCs (three to four members per village). Three companies were supposed to be involved, but one company did not show up. As a result, they went ahead and conducted the process with the two companies. The meeting took place at the commune office's meeting hall.

The CC was involved in this process in order to strengthen its relationship with the villages, thereby increasing its accountability to them.

The CEF in charge of this commune commenced the process. Next, the commune chief made a speech, which people applauded. The CEF continued chairing the session.

Following that, the sample CEF used the table below, drawn on the flipchart, to facilitate the procurement process. The bidding was done three times. The starting price was 12,000 Riel per metre. The sample CEF later explained to me that if villages received less than 12,000 Riel, the balance of funds could be used for another project with additional funds from LWD as well as additional local contributions. The first village planned to construct a road of 1,250 metres.

Table						
	Name	Company	Price	I session	II session	III session
			12,000 (Starting Price)			
1				12,000	11,500	11,200 (won)
2				12,000	12,000	12,000

The first session took place as follows. One company balloted first. Then the other company balloted. Following that, the commune chief read the ballots and the sample CEF wrote the result on the table. The same process took place for the second and third sessions. As a result, the first company won the bid as indicated in the table.

LWD gives the funds directly to the VDCs and then the VDCs give the funds to companies. This is for VDCs (not LWD) to manage projects in order to increase their confidence and capacities to manage projects.

The decentralisation reforms at the commune level, which includes the election component, had granted people electoral power, and this has been increasing people's confidence in dealing with their CC. During the Venn diagram exercise, one of the PPs explained as follows:

Respondent: But for an election, the villagers are bigger [than the CC and the DO]. If we want the district [actually the CC] to lose the election, they will lose [laughing]...In an election, even the commune and the district, if the villagers want them to lose the election, they will lose; if the villagers want them to win, they will win [laughing] (FG, a FFS member in the first research site whose name is unknown²⁴, 18 August 2012, comments in brackets added).

²⁴ The transcriber was unable to identify the respondent.

PPs have started perceiving that their electoral power for commune elections does make a difference. Hence, this confirms Öjendal and Sedara's (2011) recent finding where "people as well as the authorities are becoming increasingly accustomed to the rules of the democratic game" (p. 14). Manor (2011) explains:

As people who are poor and were previously excluded become actors, often for the first time—even at the margins—they acquire some confidence and political skills [through democratic decentralisation] (p. 8, comments in brackets added).

As a result, in order to compete with opponent parties and to be re-elected, councillors are compelled to be effective in fulfilling citizens' various rights obligations whilst in office (Thede, 2009; Manor, 2011). In other words, people have started emphasising government's accountability and slowly breaking the neo-patrimonialism through the last few commune elections.

As mentioned already, the TL theory has been criticised for demanding certain preconditions, and particularly for its reflective discourse. According to Mezirow (2000), safety is one such precondition, and hence threatened and frightened adults would not be able to participate in reflective discourse effectively. Nonetheless, because of their awareness of electoral power, PPs are not as frightened by the status of CC as before or have heightened their reflexivity in relation to the structure of the oppressive political context of Cambodia. In other words, their internal conversations (Archer, 2003) have tipped the balance towards the reflexive side, hence enabling them to exercise their agency in claiming rights.

LWD's RBA fits well with the government's attempt to decentralise governance at the CC level. Cambodia's decentralisation process seems to be nicely elucidated by Giddens' as well as the critical realist's view of agency in that Cambodian citizens have been drawing on local governance structure made amenable by the decentralisation reforms (for example, in exercising their electoral power and their rights to development), and in turn such actions have been bringing about subtle yet steady shifts in the structure (Öjendal & Sedara, 2006; Öjendal & Sedara, 2011). LWD has been trying to reinforce this decentralisation process, according to one of the senior LWD staff as well as LWD's organisational documents. In other words, LWD has been attempting to involve CC in its programming from the outset by taking advantage of and widening the participatory spaces made available through decentralisation, whilst it

has been trying to empower people to claim their rights to development. Hence, the former Country Director of LWF states:

The project specific negotiations with communes and districts promote the kind of two way advocacy that is *to empower the vulnerable* and *enlighten the powerful*. (Benini, 2008, p. 112, italics added).

Expressions such as LWD being a bridge between citizens and local government were repeatedly mentioned in the interviews with LWD's senior staff and in the external evaluation report (Benini, 2008). Thus, LWD's RBA is categorised as the middle-ground RBA (Friis-Hansen & Kyed, 2009) and, with that positionality, it has tried to widen spaces for its project villages to claim their rights to development.

As part of LWD's endeavour to make local government more accountable—although LWD's principle of dealing with rights issues is to just show PPs ways of dealing with such issues on their own, by taking advantage of its close working relationship with local government—it also facilitates CCs and DOs to work closely with citizens and provide services to them. As discussed, LWD regularly encourages commune councillors to attend village-level meetings. A VPP mentioned earlier is another way to let CC work closely with PPs. In terms of facilitating local government to provide services, in addition to LWD's own service-delivery, LWD binds local government to provide what they can offer despite their limited resources, as analysed earlier.

By being a bridge between citizens and local government as well as facilitating local government to work closely with citizens and provide services to them, LWD has further removed the socio-political impediments to TL. It should be noted, however, that it is the large-scale and well-funded operation of LWD, a legacy of a former international NGO, coupled with the decentralisation reforms as a strategically-selective policy of the Cambodian government, that allows such dynamic engagement with local government, including its capacity development. In contrast, the Belim Wusa Development Agency (BEWDA), a small and resource-constrained rights-based NGO in Ghana, is unable to work with local government that is rather unresponsive due to the concentration of power in the hands of presidentially appointed district chiefs and one-third of the district assembly members, who are more accountable to their ruling party (Aberese Ako et al., 2013). Hence, it was largely the spatio-temporal horizon of

the decentralisation process reinforced by LWD that prepared the ground for TL, and thus it is hard to universalise what LWD has been able to do out of its spatio-temporal context. As Kabeer (2011) puts it, the process of empowerment is path-dependent and context-specific.

On the other hand, LWD reinforces the process of people's claiming rights from duty-bearers. For instance, even if PPs submit requests for development activities to LWD, it still reminds them of the duty-bearers (government in this context) who are obligated to provide services to citizens (FG, Maly Van). As seen, whilst LWD provides physical inputs that were lacking, such as school buildings, it also binds the government to provide services that the latter can offer, such as teachers. During this process it also reminds PPs of the rights-based concept:

Meanwhile, you also work and provide awareness to the people that it is the role of the government to construct schools, but at the time when the government doesn't have enough resources, so LWD tries to find the resources to construct schools, but the people understand, they should understand without the awareness that it is the role of government to construct schools, right now, at least they can get commitment to provide teachers and training materials (Interview, Sophat Um 2).

Nielsen (2012) concurs with this kind of strategy and maintains that:

Grounding awareness-building in processes that include the provision of material benefits in addition to information builds the capacity of people to understand abstract concepts [of legal rights] and apply that understanding to new situations, sustaining the process of empowerment. (p. 9, comments in brackets added).

Overall, by reinforcing the decentralisation process, LWD has been attempting to further break the neo-patrimonial practice, which actually started being broken by the decentralisation process itself, as discussed earlier. One of the CEOs stated:

They dare to vote, they dare to drop the vote, and they learn to take back their trust [in CCs]. We want them to understand these things in order for them not to feel obligated to receive a *sarong* [a batik-like skirt in Cambodia], or a package of cake from them [political parties], and they have to show gratitude for their whole life (Focused group, Pick Oung, comments in brackets added).

However, this seems to be so as long as LWD and citizens do not make a fuss about the Cambodian government's half-hearted commitment to the reforms and particularly its low budget allocation, which I will problematise in the following section.

5.11 Lack of Resources or Neo-patrimonial Practice?

Neo-patrimonialism and patron-client relationships are an embedded part of Cambodian society and this general mindset makes it difficult for PPs to claim rights. For example, PPs as well as LWD staff in both research sites mentioned that local government gave priority to its political party as well as to rich or favourite villagers. Regarding local politics, one of the CEOs stated:

If the party's work overlaps with development projects, they [CCs] first carry out the party's work. And the political tendency is such that they distinguish between those from their political party and those from the other parties. They do not treat their people equally. Therefore, it causes constraint where those who side with the opposition parties dare not to go to meet them [CCs] when they have problems. Moreover, regarding development work, if they [CCs] have work, supposing that this year is an election year, they value the work of the political party and spend most of the time on the party rather than on development work (FG, Rottanak Kim, comments in brackets added).

As Öjendal and Sedara (2006) point out, the decentralisation process and LWD's rights-based reinforcement of this process still coexist with "remaining patronage structures, explicit and implicit semi-authoritarianism and the exercise of patriarchal power exercise" (p. 265). Yet recently the shift has been reported of CCs' accountability being more towards citizens than towards the CPP (Öjendal & Sedara, 2011).

Another major difficulty for people in exercising their rights to development, particularly to CCs, which is recognised by both PPs and LWD staff from all the organisational levels, is the limited amount of and primarily physical focus of CSF. The Cambodian government has been allocating only a meagre amount of development funds —namely, CSF—to CCs; so meagre, in fact, that each village can be funded only once every few years (Manor, 1999; Plummer & Tritt, 2012). Spyckerelle and Morrison (2007) and Öjendal and Sedara (2011) point out that this has been undermining the legitimacy and relevancy of CCs. One of the CEFs also stated:

The difficulty is that CCs lose people's confidence. For the commune plan, each time people request development funds, it does not mean that when they request

it this year, they will get it this year. Yes, so it is dependent on the commune's financial resources...So they may make a request this year, but maybe two years later villagers can get it. So it makes CCs lose people's confidence (FG, Champei Nak).

From the critical realist perspective, the inquiry should go beyond the empirical data to include the generative mechanisms of how and why such limited resources are allocated to the decentralisation reforms despite the political rhetoric that posits them as a priority national policy. As mentioned, Cambodia's decentralisation reforms have been implemented because of the ruling party's political calculations. Hence, essentially the centralised Cambodian government had no strong intent to drastically shift the governance system towards decentralisation. This less committed government stance is manifested in its rather small resource distribution to the reforms (Blunt & Turner, 2005). Spyckerelle and Morrison (2007) point out that as of 2006, the amount of the CSF was determined as a percentage of total domestic revenues including donor funds and was actually only one and a half US dollars per capita, which is lower than international standards. Thus, they state that "this parsimony, and the levelling off of the percentages of the government contribution to the Commune Fund, raise doubts as to what extent the government seriously pursues its stated objectives of the decentralisation reforms" (Spyckerelle & Morrison, 2007, p. 62). Moreover, CCs have only a small administrative budget to cover their recurrent costs associated with the delivery of services, thereby inhibiting their operation (Spyckerelle & Morrison, 2007; Interview, Tinekor Meas).

In addition, CCs also appear to lack the capacities to deliver more diverse services. This, for instance, is one of the reasons why the use of CSF is focused on physical infrastructure projects (Plummer & Tritt, 2012). Such projects, particularly road construction, have been their rational choices because these are relatively easy to handle and CCs have years of experience implementing them (Plummer & Tritt, 2012). Interestingly, roads are actually villagers' preference too. Given that they can only receive CSF once every few years, these funds actually became the rolling plan for road construction projects for each village (Plummer & Tritt, 2012). In other words, citizens have become path-dependent on the resource availability of local government and resigned to it.

In this context, the middle-ground RBA of LWD, which empowers citizens to claim their rights to development from CCs, may put a strain on the limited resources

and institutional capacities of CCs (Friis-Hansen & Kyed, 2009; Thede, 2009). However, it is imperative to have some immediate tangible development outcomes towards establishing the legitimacy of RBA in the context of the decentralisation process, thereby activating engagement between CCs and citizens (Friis-Hansen & Kyed, 2009), and of course towards the legitimacy of the decentralisation reforms themselves. Nonetheless, in reality citizens have started losing confidence in CCs to some extent.

Hence, there is the argument that if citizens and civil societies demand too much from fragile or failed states which lack institutional capacities, there is a danger of undermining such states' legitimacy and relevance, as well as the consolidation of democracy (Diamond, 1999; Letki, 2009). In many of the developing country contexts where governance cannot easily be transformed in the short term, LWD's approach, which aims at the gradual evolution of institutions and governance capabilities, may be more appropriate for realising "good enough governance" (Grindle, 2004).

As mentioned, in Cambodia, neo-patrimonialism and associated rent-seeking practices pervade every level of government bureaucracy, starting from the top, so much so that permanent fiscal crises have been created and thus adequate resources have been prevented from reaching frontline services such as CSF (Pak et al., 2007). Thus the fragile or failed status of Cambodia's institutional machinery is partly self-perpetuating. Hence, from the critical realist point of view, governance that is more than 'good enough' may actually be realisable if the government is really committed to reforming its neo-patrimonial practice and to the decentralisation process. However, such reforms are difficult, "since there are no counter-incentives to genuinely reform when neo-patrimonial behaviours hold such high financial rewards" (Pak et al., 2007, p. 62), especially for those central elites who are "long used to exploiting public resources to paper over [their] own internal differences" (Van de Walle, 2001, p. 55)

Another manifestation of neo-patrimonialism in rural Cambodia is the informal financing of local investment projects by the ruling CPP in parallel with or often in a complementary relationship with the formal delivery of CSF (Craig & Pak, 2011). Such party financing complements CSF in two ways: (a) to address the infrastructural needs; and more importantly (b) to win votes through CCs' formal service delivery via CSF, which is mostly dominated by the CPP, and the informal financing by the CPP (Craig & Pak, 2011). The modalities of such financing are geographical party 'working groups.' A central figure (for instance, a minister with historical connections to a province) is

normally assigned as the head of the province working group, whilst his connections in the ministry or his family tend to become the members of district working groups (Craig & Pak, 2011). District working groups are more critical because of their likely strengths in “local understanding of local realities and the needs of the commune; the ability to mobilise resources from higher levels, via powerful central figures; and ultimately the capacity to deliver” (Craig & Pak, 2011, p. 224). Whilst central elites, including government officials, military and even businessmen, seek rent from the state, they are obliged to finance working groups (Craig & Pak, 2011). Whilst the amount of financing varies depending on the district, it can be two or three times as much as CSF (Craig & Pak, 2011). Craig and Pak (2011) argue that such informal financing may be “a reasonably inexpensive way of getting votes: perhaps less expensive than adequately funding teachers’ salaries or good local health systems” (p. 238).

Here we also need to trace back the generative mechanism for this party financing. If central elites do not seek rent in the first place, theoretically there could be more CSF through the formal government channel and thus citizens’ rights would be likely to be fulfilled to a greater degree. However, the party financing underpinned by the wealth accumulation of central elites has a more direct impact on election results, as it would be more visible to citizens that the CPP is the one providing the finance. After all, it seems it is all about winning elections and political consolidation rather than substantively and sustainably benefiting the rural poor.

Hence Cambodian citizens are continuously manipulated and subjugated by consensual domination, Gramsci’s notion, instead of the previous more explicitly authoritarian and exploitative local governance. Gramsci (1971) sees that “the State is the entire complex of practical and theoretical activities with which the ruling class not only justifies and maintains the domination, but manages to win the active consent of those over whom it rules” (p. 244).

The Cambodian government officially launched its rather uncommitted decentralisation reforms a decade ago to increase its popularity and thus the political credibility and legitimacy of the ruling CPP, although it was foreseeable that the decentralisation process would inevitably entail the transfer of some power and resources to the peripheries. This is reminiscent of Gramsci’s related notion of the passive revolution, granting partial concessions to citizens in order “to preserve

dominant-class hegemony and to exclude the masses from exerting influence over political and economic institutions” (Carnoy, 1984, p. 76).

The docility and acquiescence of Cambodian citizens to the inadequate amount of CSF, which stems from the neo-patrimonial and rent-seeking practice, and the resultant mid-term rolling plan to ensure the acquisition of CSF by each village, demonstrate the passive revolution and consensual domination by the CPP. Moreover, the CPP’s financing of local investment projects in order to win votes, which is underpinned by its central elites’ rent-seeking and support, as well as citizens’ general attitude to take it for granted, indicate the same phenomena. Thus in order to counter such subtle tactics to manipulate the citizens’ mindset, the citizens need to engage in what Gramsci called the war of position, a battle at the level of consciousness or perception rather than a war of manoeuvre or a frontal attack on government (Carnoy, 1984; Hay, 2006).

LWD has been helping citizens to engage in this war of position. In particular, it has been raising their awareness of their rights and enabling them to claim their rights to development, as discussed. Both are actually within the rules of play set by the decentralisation reforms. However, LWD does not seem critical of the Cambodian government’s half-hearted commitment to decentralisation, which is influenced by the neo-patrimonial and rent-seeking practice within the government, although they could possibly enable PPs to learn such “a structural world view; that is, one that sees supposedly individual crises and dilemmas as produced by the intersection of larger structural and systemic forces” (Brookfield, 2012, p. 137). In other words, LWD has not conscientised its PPs to the extent that they have become aware of the passive revolution and consensual domination through the neo-patrimonial government’s decentralisation.

Although LWD began operating in Cambodia immediately after the fall of the Khmer Rouge back in 1979, its operation needed to be ‘depoliticised’ in the volatile political environment of the socialist regime throughout the 1980s. Even in the early 1990s, as a development NGO it jumped on the bandwagon, in terms of its depoliticised stance, with the influx of international development NGOs around the time of the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC). By then, international development NGOs had generally focused on service delivery and thus been depoliticised in the context of neoliberalism and the Washington Consensus where the

service-delivery role of government had shrunk and thus NGOs were expected to fill that gap. Thus those development NGOs that started operating in the early 1990s had never been politicised until the RBA discourse arrived in Cambodia rather late in the 2000s. By looking at this depoliticised history of LWD or development NGOs in Cambodia in general, it is no surprise that LWD appears to accept uncritically the current status of the decentralisation reforms and to exhibit no intention to confront and reform such government policy lacking strong political will. Nor does it appear to enable and equip its PPs to do so. Hence LWD plays the game within the rules of play or structures set by government, thereby promoting ‘thin’ social rights.

5.12 Conclusion

This chapter sought to provide an understanding of the process in which LWD has influenced the agency of its PPs in fulfilling their rights to development in the dynamic context where Cambodian citizens had been drawing on the local governance structure made amenable by the decentralisation reforms in exercising their electoral power and their rights to development, and in turn such actions had been bringing about subtle yet steady shifts in the structure. Under the decentralisation process, more participative and democratic space was created, partly through the commune development planning system, in which village representatives participate, thereby building accountability from below. However, that space tends to be open to ordinary citizens only to a limited extent, in terms of actual participation as well as the substance of discussion. To resolve this democratic deficit at the local governance level, LWD’s middle-ground RBA has been reinforcing the interactions between local government and citizens to facilitate a greater and genuine participation of citizens as well as increased accountability by local government, thereby bringing about further shifts in the structure and hence removing the socio-political impediments to TL for claiming rights. To do so, LWD has built the citizens’ confidence and capacities, whilst it has developed the capacities of local government. The Cambodian government has been privileging the decentralisation reforms even though their interest is primarily politically motivated. Therefore it has been really a window of opportunity for LWD with a large-scale and well-funded operation, partly through which it has established its credibility and influenced government, to embark on playing the role of the middle-ground RBA in this particular spatio-temporal context. In this context, LWD

has aimed at the gradual realisation of rights in accordance with the gradual evolution of local governance capacities rather than the immediate fulfilment of rights, for example by binding government to provide services that the latter could offer with its current resources and capacities.

Regarding its engagement with citizens, it seems that LWD's process-oriented approach, particularly the high-level facilitation skills of its staff, has been instrumental in furthering the perspective transformation of PPs for claiming rights. On the other hand, its result-oriented approach, stemming from its subordinate position to donors, seems to have undermined such a process-oriented approach to some extent, and this is manifested in, for example, the dependency attitude of some PPs. Furthermore, LWD has not conscientised its PPs to the extent that they have problematised the limited amount of CSF and hence become aware of the passive revolution and the consensual domination through decentralisation by the neo-patrimonial government. The LWD has thereby promoted 'thin' social rights.

In the resource-starved context of rural Cambodia, LWD has been building the capacity of its PPs—instrumental learning—in order to meet their basic needs. This is a precondition for their perspective transformation toward enhanced agency for claiming rights. In other words, such transformation hinges on their capacity development and resultant improved well-being. On the other hand, in the context of the 'human rights gap' in rural Cambodia, the PPs' increased understanding of human rights has played a significant role in their confidence development when dealing with local government.

Chapter 6: Building the Confidence and Capacities of Citizens

6.1 Introduction: The Service-delivery Approach as a Springboard for Rights-based Empowerment

Although considerable confusion can be caused by mixing the service-delivery approach (SDA) with the rights-based approach (RBA), some NGOs' experiences—such as the HIV/AIDS project by CARE Rwanda (Jones, 2005), the community development for the socially marginalised by the Collection Action for Drought Mitigation in Bolangir (CADMB) in India (Akerkar, 2005), and the health project for rural women by MASUM in India (Miwa, 2008)—suggest that it does indeed seem possible to use SDA to help people to enhance their reflexivity in relation to structures, thus paving the way for achieving rights-based goals. In this regard, Chapman (2009) points out

...the role that service delivery efforts can play in strengthening empowerment processes, local organisations, leadership development, alternative development models, trust building, and concrete changes in people's living conditions. In many cases these types of work are necessary steps before any work on rights is conceivable. (p. 180).

She goes on to say that how the SDA is done and whether it contributes to more transformative work is more critical than whether it is just done (Chapman, 2009).

LWD had been implementing participatory community development and empowerment before its adoption of RBA, and in addition to its efficacious rights-awareness raising, it harnessed such tradition as a springboard for enhancing its project participants' (PPs) capacities and confidence in claiming their rights.

This chapter will begin by looking at LWD's repeated process of empowerment, which has been the backbone of the whole process of confidence and capacity development. It will then identify specific platforms within LWD's programme that have been used for rights-based empowerment. Subsequently, it will analyse ways in which collective and mutual learning, an integral part of transformative learning (TL), has been created. Following that, it will unpack how the 'learning by doing' approach promoted by LWD has fostered the empowerment of its PPs. Next, it will delve into how PPs' rights awareness has been enhanced through a conscientisation process.

Finally, it will argue that it is through a gradual process that they have become confident by continuous learning and practising.

6.2 Repeated Process for Empowerment

Community Empowerment Facilitators (CEFs) stay at their assigned villages during their work days, leading to their increased interaction with PPs, and thereby bringing about a repeated process for empowerment. For example, the sample CEF whom I observed in the second research site stayed in her assigned village at the house of a villager whose sister—the village bank leader—lived right next to that house. This enabled the CEF to easily support her in matters of the village bank. Emotional support (Berger, 2004; Fetherston & Kelly, 2007) and authentic and trusting relationships with teachers and among peers (Taylor, 2001; Cranton, 2006; Taylor, 2009) are known to foster TL. The CEFs' continual stay in the worksite during the weekdays helps to facilitate the establishment of such meaningful relationships with PPs. Similarly, Kabeer and Huq (2010) highlight the significance of social relationships between NGO workers, who actually resided in communities where they worked, and female PPs, in relation to the latter's empowerment process in Bangladesh: "by providing knowledge of rights, respect, courage to stand up for one's beliefs and a sense of wellbeing *through working alongside people in the villages*, it [the NGO] inspired an enduring solidarity amongst the women it served" (p. 79, italics and comments in brackets added).

Such repeated attempts at empowerment were necessary in order to empower PPs to deal with the oppressive structure of Cambodia, as LWD's senior staff explained:

We have to acknowledge the Cambodian context. I think we sometimes, we are also afraid to advocate to the government because they also use the power. [???] So I think because of the political and also Cambodian context, for the empowerment process, we try again and again, and we spend much time to build capacity [of people] and to build trust in the community (Interview, Munny Sock 1, comments in brackets added.).

6.3 Community Development and Empowerment as a Platform for Rights-based Empowerment

Those PPs in both research sites who belonged to community-based organisations (CBOs) and LWD staff from every organisational level pointed out that

PPs' roles and involvement in CBOs helped build their confidence and capacities to claim their rights and deal with rights problems. For example, their roles forced them to speak in front of people. The Farmer Field School (FFS) in each village is divided into geographical sub-groups, one of whose leaders said:

I dare [to speak in front of people]. Before, I was illiterate and did not really dare to speak to other groups; I did not dare to speak at all. After I participated in FFS and LWD, I was frequently invited to join the meetings. I can have some guts to speak. It can be said that after they asked me, I dared to answer and spoke better than before (Life story interview, Kunthea Oung, comments in brackets added).

Confidence in speaking in CBOs is the first step toward claiming their rights (Focus group (FG), Rottanak Kim). LWD fosters this kind of confidence so that their voices can eventually be heard, for example, in meetings for formulating a village development plan (Interview, Sophat Um 2). As another example, PPs' roles in CBOs made them actually engage with rights problems such as domestic violence (DV). On one of the research sites, a secretary of a women's group was invited, together with its two other members, by their village leader to join the arbitration processes for the DV cases:

In solving the problem, he allowed me to share with the conflicting parties the idea that women have rights and DV should not happen to women. Generally speaking, I explained to the men that they should give women their rights (Interview, Kolab Pen).

This kind of involvement is expected to increase their confidence and capacities to deal with rights issues, as Nielsen (2012) argues that CBOs can be a sustainable space for rights-based empowerment.

PPs' roles as CBO members—whether it is about speaking in public or dealing with rights violation—may stretch their confidence and capacities to the limit. Such experiences could cause a disorienting dilemma (Mezirow, 2000) or the edge of knowing (Berger, 2004) towards TL. On the edge, people often need support initially: Berger (2004) states that “perhaps the best technique for supporting people at their growing edge is simply to provide openings for people to push against the edge and then be company for them as they stand at the precipice; once they are there, the growing edge is its own teacher” (p. 345). The CEFs' continual presence in villages and thus frequent contacts with PPs are considered to provide such emotional support.

Regarding the direct interactions with duty-bearers, those PPs in both research sites who were members of CBOs, as well as LWD staff from every organisational level, stated that belonging to CBOs (particularly of village development committees (VDCs)) helped people grapple with commune councils (CCs) and district offices (DOs). This was because part of their responsibilities as CBO members required them to constantly engage with local government. One of the VDC members stated:

Before, I had not worked [as a VDC member]. [At that time] I did not dare to communicate or talk with the CC. After I worked as a village community chief [actually as a VDC member], I dared to speak and communicate with them because it is relevant to my work. So I must dare to speak and ask. And my communication [with the CC] is different from the one before. Before, I was just an ordinary person who dared not to ask and to communicate with the CC. After I worked [as a VDC member], I must get in touch with them for the work and the better development [of the village] (Interview, Jorani Tan 1, comments in brackets added).

Whilst their business matters with local government might be purely administrative, such as the announcement to villagers of the birth certificate registration procedure, the following unique case of another VDC member indicates that the discussion went beyond administrative tasks to include a casual yet substantive rights-based conversation:

They [the CC] called me to join, like I was called to join meetings, for example, the commune meeting. When I went there, they allowed us to ask questions, to wonder about and to ask questions about laws, something like that...So I started asking like, when laws were made and announced, how the laws were used, something like that. I just asked questions and they answered (Life story interview, Chean Huy, comments in brackets added).

The concepts of participation and addressing those in higher social strata are still generally foreign in hierarchical Cambodia. Nevertheless, frequent interactions between local government and people are essential for RBA, since those “enhance...the motivation of both to participate in decision-making and maintenance activities” (Friis-Hansen & Kyed, 2009, p. 64). Here LWD created the spaces for such interactions or the spaces where PPs practise actually dealing with local government.

Participant observation in both research sites and LWD staff from every organisational level pointed out that PPs' involvement in physical projects increased their capacities to claim their rights. LWD's RBA manual confirms this fact:

Small socio-economic programmes are not only for economic achievement. Achievement is important because it builds confidence[,] making the next steps possible. The most important benefits are for the people to pinpoint the areas of exploitation, learn the process of planning and implementing, and above all practice decision-making as a community. (Lutheran World Federation Cambodia, 2009, p. 58).

It was interesting to hear from one of the sample CEFs (when she was working with one of the village leaders) that another village leader, with whom she used to work, put the following mark for the name of LWD in financial reports or receipts:



L is the common abbreviation of LWD used among PPs and the dollar sign with the upward arrow indicates that LWD used a large amount of money to improve his village. The improvement is not just about material and economic conditions, but also about the capacities of PPs. More concretely, LWD uses physical projects, which actually require considerable funds, as part of the capacity development of PPs. A good example of this is Village Partnership Projects (VPPs), mentioned already. VPPs do bring about tangible benefits such as road and latrine construction, yet at the same time they enhance the capacities of PPs to write a proposal, which is an essential part of claiming rights to development from CCs.

6.4 Collective Learning and Empowerment

I observed in various meetings facilitated by LWD in both research sites that CEFs encouraged mutual learning among PPs, especially through sharing and learning from one another's problems and solutions. One FFS member testified:

When we grow vegetables or crops and if there are some problems, we have to discuss with one another in order to find ways to increase the agricultural production and hence to support our daily life (FG interview, Mealea Chim).

LWD's senior staff also commented:

We promote adult learning principles. The participatory learning process is appropriate for communities. For example, during training, we don't lecture, but we facilitate. So we let participants share or discuss. For example, as a method for training, we have to ask participants to work in groups [???] We just ask them to share their issues or knowledge with each other... We facilitate them to share or learn from each other (Interview, Munny Sock 1).

During FFS sessions, even though some of the PPs did not speak out, I observed 'active side-talking' among them, some of which seemed to be related to the topics of the discussions. These intended and unintended discussion spaces can be interpreted as reflective discourse or dialogue, a key component of TL, especially in terms of communicative learning where PPs learn the others' points of view. Such spaces for mutual learning seem particularly pertinent to women, the majority of PPs, for their unique connected knowing whereby women "try to enter into the other person's perspective, adopting their frame of mind, trying to see the world through their eyes" (Belenky & Stanton, 2000, p. 87).

This mutual learning environment created by LWD also seems to provide peer support from fellow PPs. One of the VDC members made mention of her participation in LWD training courses:

Before, when I had not joined training courses, I did know anybody, so I felt afraid, not that afraid, but felt really shy, partly because I didn't understand [those courses]. After I went through many courses, I got to know and became close to many people, so I was not feeling afraid. Whether what I speak is right or wrong, I still dare to speak (Life story Interview, Jorani Tan 2, comments in brackets added).

Although this is the only substantive coding that I obtained from the fieldwork, LWD explicitly considers women's groups as a space to offer such peer support. The LWD's Women Empowerment Guideline states:

Women's group[s] organise...monthly meeting[s] to be safe, fun and secure place[s] for women to socialise, share life experiences and discuss issues of

importance to them such as domestic violence, gender[-]based violence and so on. (Life with Dignity, 2011b, p. 4).

Such emotional support (Berger, 2004; Fetherston & Kelly, 2007), authentic and trusting relationships among peers (Taylor, 2001; Cranton, 2006) and social recognition (Nohl, 2009) foster TL. In addition, Bridwell (2013) and Wilhelmson (2006), based on their empirical research, infer that the issues of the preconditions (Mezirow, 2000) and cognitive maturity (Merriam, 2004) required for TL, which are hard to find among the marginalised like rural Cambodians, may be addressed by such spaces for dialogue and relationships whereby participants are enabled to take part and support each other. Pearson (2011) argues that the creation of safe spaces is of particular importance for enhancing one's reflexivity in relation to the various socio-cultural and political forces in Cambodia:

Asking people to let go of their deeply held beliefs in order to change can create great stress, especially if the people around them are not involved in the same change process. (p. 180).

Similarly, in their research in the East African countries, Duveskog et al. (2011) and Duveskog (2013) argue that collective learning and changes, which provide peer support for new behaviours acquired through FFS, are more in tune with collective rural societies, where one's behaviour is closely monitored by other residents.

Those PPs in both research sites who belonged to VDCs and LWD staff from every organisational level indicated that LWD had been advising PPs to increase their community solidarity in order to deal with duty-bearers. One of the VDC members stated:

If we go individually, only us alone, we couldn't ask something from them. When there are common agreements among three to five people, or in one group or one village, we could send a proposal to and request something from the higher level and they may accept it. That's all. A project couldn't be achieved by just one person; they won't give it to us (Life story interview, Chenda Meng)

Merriam et al. (2007) and Brookfield (2000) suggest reflective discourse fosters solidarity toward collective actions. However, this is an example where an intervention has been conducted in such a way in order to equip PPs with the concrete knowledge and skills necessary for taking social actions—namely, community organising and

mobilisation. Moreover, this is reminiscent of the Freirean approach where “it is collectively that people not only solve problems but, moreover, transform their sociopolitical conditions” (Finger & Asun, 2001, p. 86).

I need to emphasise here though that mutual learning, peer support and community solidarity are not something to be taken for granted in the Cambodian context. In particular, the trauma from conflicts, particularly the memory of forced collective labour during the Khmer Rouge regime, has continued to inhibit people from trusting each other and working together (Pellini & Ayres, 2007), despite the growing social cohesion through emerging village associations. In this sense, LWD’s attempt to create safe spaces through community organising is one of the indispensable components for building trust, fostering learning and enabling people to claim their rights collectively. On the other hand, social hierarchy does influence group dynamics, as evidenced in the silence of the female VDC member in the presence of the CC-appointed VDC members during my ‘failed’ FG interview (in Chapter three). Mezirow (2003) points out that the mutual agreements and understanding required by reflective discourse can easily be distorted by power relationships and cultural inequality.

6.5 ‘Learning by Doing’ for Empowerment

On numerous occasions such as gatherings of women’s groups, FFSs, and a rights-based training, I observed that LWD staff encouraged PPs to speak out there. The common expression that LWD staff used on those occasions can be summarised as ‘Don’t be afraid to share your ideas even if they are not 100% correct.’ During her facilitation of the women’s group meeting, programme support staff said to PPs:

Don’t be shy to share. Even scientists, who made Apollo, made mistakes; but some continued to work. Nobody is always correct (Field notes, Maly Van, 16 August 2012).

Although it is recognised that a disorienting dilemma or the edge of knowing is an essential part of TL, there is a danger that educators or facilitators may push people too far. Gravett and Petersen (2009) point out that “if learners are pushed too far, they can become defensive, resist the new learning, and withdraw in order to keep safe” (p. 107). Hence they suggest that educators or facilitators create and sustain “a caring and

collaborative context characterised by trust and respect in the process of pushing learners to their learning edge” (Gravett & Petersen, 2009, p. 107). As mentioned, LWD appeared to help people to create such a space in the form of CBOs.

During my fieldwork, at one of the primary schools LWD organised a public forum on child rights. On the panel side were the commune chief, the deputy district education director, the deputy district governor, and the deputy health centre director, whilst on the participants’ side were primary and secondary school pupils and village representatives including villager leaders, deputy villager leaders and VDC. There people’s confidence to speak out to duty-bearers was manifested. After the panels’ speeches, the programme support staff encouraged participants to ask questions:

Programme support staff: Even if you are a child, you can ask questions. This is a good training for the next generation.

Village representative: I have a proposal for education. Don’t take 7,000R from junior high school pupils and 8,000R from senior high school pupils [as extra fees].

Deputy district education director: Those fees are used for building schools and purchasing school materials. For example, in this school, 7,000R multiplied by 400 pupils [although his calculation was hypothetical as the school was primary]...

Villager representative: Please don’t take money when pupils come for registration...

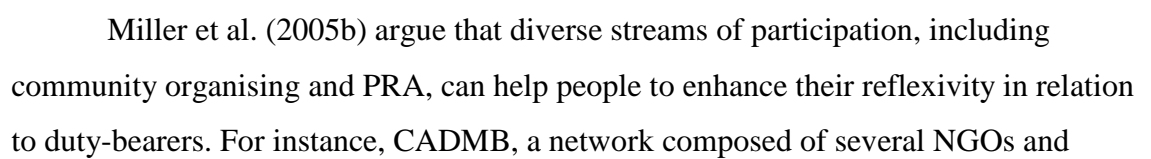
Deputy district education director: The registration fee for secondary schooling is 1,000R. I will discuss with my officers [about this issue] (Field notes, 18 September 2012, comments in brackets added).

Some empirical evidence on TL for the marginalised—homeless women in the US (Bridwell, 2013) and farmers in East Africa (Duveskog, 2013)—indicate that through reflective discourse or dialogue, people started speaking out as they increased their confidence or agency; or conversely, they increased their confidence or agency as they started speaking out. However, the kind of interaction between citizens and duty-bearers illustrated in the above quotation should not be considered normal in the light of a traditionally authoritarian government, the legacy of conflicts including risk aversion and fear, and the historically embedded patron-client and neo-patrimonial practice in Cambodia.

As exemplified by the VPP that has the purpose of allowing PPs to experience the whole project cycle, another approach by LWD is to let PPs work on their own in order to build their confidence and capacities. In the annual assessment and planning

sessions for project villages²⁵, LWD staff use participatory rural appraisal (PRA) methods including mapping and flowcharts, which attract PPs' involvement, in order to foster their sense of ownership of the problems of their villages (Interview, Sovann Vy). Whilst CEFs facilitate this process in the early stage of LWD's intervention, PPs, more specifically VDC members, start taking up the facilitation role in the later stage (Interview, Sovann Vy). In addition, during the training on climate change and RBA, I observed that LWD introduced participants to disaster mapping (Photo 3 below), through which the participants could show the government which areas are affected by disasters in order to negotiate for disaster mitigation measures or hold the government to account in that domain.

²⁵ CEFs and VDC, in a participatory manner, facilitate the annual assessment on the empowerment level of a village and, based on its result, facilitate the annual planning.



CBOs in India, and the Ecumenical Centre for Research, Education and Advocacy (ECREA), a local NGO in Fiji, employ social analysis methods such as PRA in order to enable socially marginalised groups to critically analyse their own realities (Akerkar, 2005; Llewellyn-Fowler & Overton, 2010). The aim of the social analysis is to mobilise them to assess their human rights entitlements, and plans emerging from such analyses become the basis for their negotiation with local government (Akerkar, 2005; Llewellyn-Fowler & Overton, 2010). Akerkar (2005) maintains that through such a transparent process of social analysis and the generation of alternative plans, SDA can be complementary to RBA, which aims to empower the marginalised to achieve their rights.

I also observed situations where LWD staff made or encouraged CBO members or villager leaders to lead community meetings, such as a women's group meeting and an agricultural cooperative meeting. In a women's group meeting, programme support staff encouraged the women's group themselves to lead their future meetings:

Next time, the women's group's leader has to lead a meeting and don't wait for LWD's staff to lead. So we are here to show you how to prepare a meeting. As a leader, you have to know how to make a proposal, lead people, and make decisions. The deputy leader has to do the same thing in the absence of the leader. The secretary needs to know how to record (Field notes, Maly Van, 16 August 12).

The external evaluation report indeed concludes:

Practical empowerment and 'learning by doing' is regarded as most effective by communities. (Cossar, 2011, p. 23).

A few studies on participatory natural resource management indicate that instrumental learning like 'learning by doing' can bring about transformative learning for more confidence or enhanced agency (Sims & Sinclair, 2008; Duveskog & Friis-Hansen, 2009; Sinclair et al., 2011; Duveskog, 2013). For example, through FFS in East Africa:

The farming skills gained increased not only the confidence in farming practices but created a feeling of confidence in the role of being a farmer...[which eventually] emerged in terms of confidence in the questioning of authority. (Duveskog, 2013, p. 90, comments in brackets added).

An interesting outcome of those empowerment attempts relates to the former female leader of the village bank in the research village, who was elected as a commune chief in the 2012 commune election. It is rare for women, especially in early middle-age, like her, to be elected as commune councillors, let alone commune chiefs.

6.6 Increased Rights Understanding through Conscientisation

Human right awareness training sessions were mostly provided by LWD as mentioned earlier. In particular, LWD conducts such training by utilising ‘applied’ exercises. During the training on climate change and RBA, LWD staff asked participants how climate change is related to human rights. Their answers are summarised as follows:

- Climate change affects people through floods, which relate to human rights [rights to life and security].
- Climate change causes illness and so is related to health [rights to health].
- Climate change causes lack of water [rights to water, rights to life and security, and rights to subsistence]. There will be no water for cows [rights to food and rights to subsistence].
- Temperature increases [rights to life and security and rights to food].
- Forest fires affect land and we cannot grow vegetables [rights to food and rights to subsistence] (Field notes, 13 September 2012, comments in brackets added).

Note that the participants did not explicitly mention particular rights related to the consequences of the climate change (such as rights to health), listed in the brackets. They did, however, show they understood that climate change affects their various rights, even though they could not express this in technical rights terms. This exercise also indicates that in addition to explaining human rights concepts, LWD tries to help PPs connect their realities with pertinent human rights. MASUM, an Indian NGO that aims at improving the conditions of rural women, takes an approach that enables those women to develop a ‘sense’ of personal rights through engaging with their immediate health problems, rather than an approach that didactically teaches them about rights in

abstract terms (Miwa, 2008). Through this approach that enables women to engage with their realities, they realise what it means to fulfill their rights based on their own experiences (Miwa, 2008). Similarly, Harris-Curtis et al. (2005) find that some European NGOs recognise the importance of such an approach:

Some argue that one has to ‘feel’ rights before they can be realised. Human rights have to be pursued with considerable sensitivity to the existing, culturally embedded notions of what is right. (p. 42).

Such a method is likely to bring about TL (Hansman & Wright, 2009; Weimer, 2012), since it helps “the learners to develop a critical consciousness about themselves and the context and society in which they live” (Hansman & Wright, 2009, p. 124).

LWD also conducts rights-based training by utilising dialogical processes. Tagoe (2008) finds that in ActionAid Ghana’s operation, local facilitators, who lacked the capacity to facilitate the dialogical awareness-raising process inspired by Freire²⁶, tended to focus on conventional service delivery, but shied away from addressing structural (rights-related) problems. Miller et al. (2005a) point out that the Freirean approach may not necessarily generate the intended outcomes, since its success “depends on the skilful facilitation of group discussions about complex social issues with people who are not accustomed to such conversations” (p. 54). However, I encountered a number of occasions where LWD staff were posing questions to bring about dialogical processes with PPs during rights-based training. Weimer (2012) asserts the power of questioning in TL: “questioning can be learner-centered and transformative when...the questions offer learners the chance to figure things out for themselves” (p. 447). During the climate change and RBA training, the following interaction unfolded:

Programme support staff: Why are rights related to climate change? What is the strategy in RBA? If we are afraid of making mistakes, factories do not need to make rubber [This is to encourage the participants not to be shy].

Participant: Strategies are ways to analyse, practise and solve problems.

Programme support staff: What are human rights?

Participant: We all have rights since we were born.

Programme support staff: What about babies?

Some participants: No. **Other participants:** Yes.

²⁶ ActionAid uses REFLECT (Regenerated Freirean Literacy through Empowering Community Techniques), a literacy programme inspired by Freire.

Programme support staff: If they [babies] do not have rights, they cannot live. As a mother, she should know that a baby has rights, since a baby is in the womb. Mothers still take care of them even when babies are in the womb. Many people talk about rights, but they do not know (Field notes, 13 September 2012, comments in brackets added).

Linking human rights with realities and the dialogical processes resonates with Freire's conscientisation where reality and social conditions are analysed dialogically and critically, thereby revealing dehumanising and oppressive structures (Freire, 1970).

The existing domestic and international legal and policy frameworks are the foundation of LWD's RBA. More specifically, its RBA is based on international human rights instruments such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, domestic laws such as the Constitution of Cambodia, international development policy frameworks such as the Millennium Development Goals, and domestic development policy frameworks such as the Cambodian government's rectangular strategies (Lutheran World Federation Cambodia, 2009). LWD formulated the manual and training materials for particular rights, such as rights to water, by consulting these legal and policy documents together with RBA materials developed by other NGOs and UN agencies as well as by forming the working groups composed of LWD's human resource department personnel and project staff (for example, CEOs and Gender and Advocacy Liaison Officers (GALOs)) (Interview, Munny Sock 2).

As seen above, instead of solely relying on the didactic preaching of human rights, LWD tries to help PPs connect their realities with pertinent human rights. LWD aims at enabling PPs to gradually and progressively move towards the understanding of existing human rights instruments. Thus one of LWD's senior staff said:

If you directly introduce human rights to PPs, you will be rejected. Thus you need to gradually integrate human rights without being antagonistic to, for example, Islamic culture or Cambodian culture. Thus try to find common ground between human rights and Cambodian culture (Interview, Munny Sock 3).

There is a debate as to how far RBA should accommodate local contexts. From other NGO fields, clashes have been reported in Uganda between the local practice of vigilantes to restore moral values in the Internally Displaced Persons camp and RBA's moral imperatives (Mergelsberg, 2012) and in Rwanda between children's agency in their daily lives and RBA's uniform categorisation of children as vulnerable (Pells,

2012). Holland et al. (2004) suggest a middle way, namely: “the need to recognise the complexities of dialogue while moving away from binary ideas about methods and their appropriateness” and “validat[ing] alternative methods without essentialising them and so marginalising them” (p. 262). In a similar vein, moving away from binary ideas, Santos (2002) proposes cross-cultural dialogue, working towards a hybrid conception of human rights as a normative practice. This emulates the perspective of social constructivists in which rights are shaped through actual interchange, struggle and contestation (Cowan et al., 2001; Nyamu-Musembi, 2005; Miller, 2010). In line with these thoughts, some rights-based NGOs employ locally acceptable concepts of human rights. For example, the Programme for Appropriate Technology for Health (PATH), an international NGO with experience in working with the issue of female genital mutilation in the African continent, recognises as a manifestation of rights the communal maintenance of cultural practices, and effects change from within communities through dialogue (Ensor, 2005). Through these approaches, for communities, “[b]y maintaining all aspects of the process apart from genital cutting, an important cultural commodity is retained,” whilst PATH escapes the risk of RBA becoming a top-down and confrontational strategy, which could shut down the communication between PATH and these communities (Ensor, 2005, p. 273).

It is interesting to hear from two PPs that claiming rights reasonably made them confident as well. One of them stated:

I think that I claim what is correct, clear and good, in which I have confidence in these points. I have to claim what is correct and appropriate according to what I need....basically I have confidence in that kind of claiming (Life story interview, Jorani Tan 2).

LWD’s RBA manual points out that one of the sources of power for advocating is “[w]orking in accordance with national and international laws and for common benefit” (Lutheran World Federation Cambodia, 2009, p. 47). In fact, a number of PPs as well as LWD staff from every organisational level mentioned that an understanding of human rights led to the PPs having increased confidence. The following PP indicated that whilst she still feared local government, she tried to cling to rights to overcome such fear:

Research Assistant: What do you think, aunty? For those who do not give any idea yet, what do you think? If you, aunties or sisters, have to approach the CC and the DO as we just gave an example, what do you think?

Participant: I am afraid to approach them, but if there is any real urgent matter, I will go, go to ask for help from them and they will solve it.

Research Assistant: Why are you afraid of them?

Participant: Because we are poor, that's why we are afraid.

Research Assistant: Because you think that you are poor?

Participant: Yes, but no matter how poor we are, there are still the laws and they will solve it for us (FG, a female FFS member in the first research site whose name is unknown²⁷, 3 April 2012).

Another PP said that women's confidence in dealing with DV has been enhanced as a result of increased human rights understanding among women:

In the past, when husbands fought wives, women in the village were afraid to call the police. If they did so, their husbands would fight them even more fiercely than before. So they were afraid. But now, after the dissemination of information and training on equal rights between men and women [by LWD], if husbands fight their wives to the extent that the wives have wounds, the wives can call the police, who will arrest the husbands and put them in prison (Interview, Kolab Pen, comments in brackets added).

It is when the marginalised acquire a knowledge of their rights, that they are able to become more agential in exercising their rights and implementing changes (Hansman & Wright, 2009; Kabeer, 2011; Bridwell, 2013). As discussed elsewhere, TL in non-rights-based participatory approaches such as FFS can bring about social engagement, for example in the form of questioning local authorities. Thus Duveskog (2013) claims that "FFS with its combination of impact on the individual level as well as social structures thereby seem well placed to serve as a platform for wider social change" (p. 108). However, the value added by RBA is that explicit knowledge of rights provides something that people can cling onto in exercising their rights.

6.7 Gradual Processes for Becoming Confident and Competent through Continuous Learning and Practising

It is difficult for PPs to increase their reflexivity in relation to their social circumstances. Below I will illustrate such processes mostly through data from the life story interviews. Due, however, to the quasi-theoretical sampling within the limited

²⁷ The transcriber was unable to identify the respondent.

time of the fieldwork, which was narrowed down to only a handful of PPs for life story interviews in inquiring about the processes, as well as the general lack of their ability to articulate such processes, I was only able to rely on a few samples by way of illustration. Nonetheless, their accounts offer some important insights into the processes.

When they practised their rights initially, they generally seemed afraid. It appears that they continued to have some mixed feelings (whether being both afraid and happy or being both shy and brave). A high school pupil who belonged to LWD's youth group needed to talk to the school director. She stopped schooling at year five, but when she came back to study, she entered year nine. She wanted to make sure of the right procedure for that. The following was what was going on in her mind and emotions:

Researcher: Okay, so what's going on in your mind?

Respondent: I felt very shy, dared not to talk to him.

Researcher: Okay, still spoke to him?

Respondent: Yes.

Researcher: Okay, what does that mean to you? What does talking to the school director mean to you?

Researcher: Maybe, what did...that make you feel?

Respondent: I felt both happy and scared because I didn't think that I would dare to talk to him, I felt a little happy and a little afraid (Life story interview, Phhoung Hout 1).

She eventually needed to muster her courage to talk to the director:

I thought, I had rights too, I walked to, [pause] I thought that I had rights to talk to him, but when I was speaking, besides having rights, I also needed to be brave to talk to him (Life story interview, Phhoung Hout 1).

The reflexivity of these people were exercised in relation to the authoritarian and hierarchical social structures and governed by the legacy of conflicts. Yet they started understanding human rights and practising speaking out, which enabled them to act more reflexively and agentially. Therefore, such states as being initially afraid, having mixed feelings, and mustering their courage indicate that their internal conversations (Archer, 2003) have tipped the balance towards the reflexive side, hence enabling them to exercise their agency in claiming rights. If I use the vocabulary of TL, a disorienting dilemma or the edge of knowing takes place in the intersection between structures and reflexivity. In such a precarious state of limbo, the peer support from fellow PPs and the

repeated empowerment made available by the CEFs' continuous presence are essential for their increased exercise of agency.

As mentioned in some of the interview quotations presented, PPs themselves, CEFs and CEOs stated that the PPs generally went through gradual processes of perspective transformation. One of the VDC members explained her process of becoming confident in dealing with the CC:

Generally, I started having confidence little by little. Before I didn't understand, so I didn't have self-confidence. For example, when I understood and received the support from the commune, I started having confidence little by little. Today I have strong confidence, and therefore I can have rights to claim, and I can also claim something (Life story interview, Jorani Tan 2).

Moreover, such a process to become confident entails continuous attempts at learning. For example, a former VDC member stated:

I didn't really understand the laws. However, when I had learned and understood the laws, I started changing little by little. Then I became brave about getting involved in those works [engaging with local government] step by step. It took long months and years until I understood the laws. I went to a lot of places to learn the laws and I even went to the provincial capital... So I dare, dare to speak, dare to complain to those people working at the higher levels (Life story interview, Chean Huy, comments in brackets added).

As discussed elsewhere, the cognitive maturity (Merriam, 2004) required for TL is generally absent in Cambodia, due to the dearth and nature of education. In addition, the authoritarian and hierarchical social structures, coupled with the legacy of conflicts and the fatalism deriving from the Buddhist notion of *karma*, have prevented people from being proactive and taking risks, hence "the status quo... is preferable to risking change that could attract more troubling, difficult and painful circumstances" (Pearson, 2011, p. 41). All these have exercised the powers of constraint over people's reflexivity. Therefore, confidence and capacity development occurs incrementally in the rural Cambodian context.

PPs also became confident through actually practising rights, as seen below, in the words of a former VDC member:

Research Assistant: So, at that time, did you continue being afraid, when you talked to the CC?

Respondent: Did, I did.

Research Assistant: Still afraid, so when?

Respondent: Yes, I did. Although I was afraid, I still shared my ideas during each meeting, I shared my ideas all the time.

Research Assistant: Even with the local authorities?

Respondent: Yes, that's fine. There's no problem for me. In my area, at the CC and the DO, I still share my ideas (Life story interview, Sophol Inn 2).

The simple interpretation of this phenomenon is instrumental learning through 'learning by doing,' more specifically practising actually dealing with local government. To extend the scope of the discussion further, Niewolny and Wilson (2009), in words reminiscent of Giddens' structuration theory and critical realism, argue:

Learning contexts are informed by and through the way social order and agential activity are tightly coproducing; the learning is *in* and *among*, not separate from or applied to such coproducing relations, not in either the agent affected by context or the context determining the agent. (p. 34, italics original).

Hence it is important to elucidate how 'learning by doing' was made possible by the context or the structure and how it in turn influences the structure. From the critical realist perspective, humans are reflexive agents. This claim has been substantiated by the result of the Venn diagram which revealed that PPs were aware that their mental distance from CC has been reduced over the years through decentralisation as well as through LWD's intervention. In other words, through structurally-oriented strategic calculation (Jessop, 2005), they saw the current structure as strategically-selective for or in favour of them. In addition, they had been empowered instrumentally (for example, abilities to speak out and to make a project proposal), communicatively (for instance, mutual learning and coaching), and emotionally (such as encouragement by CEFs and peer support). Thus both the social and the personal became conducive to 'learning by doing.' And 'learning by doing' in turn not only increased the confidence of the PP but also enhanced the accountability of CCs, thereby influencing the structure.

6.8 Conclusion

This chapter has revealed that LWD's SDA, more specifically participatory community development and empowerment, has contributed to enhancing its PPs' capacities and confidence in claiming their rights. First and foremost, the CEFs' stay in their assigned villages has brought about the repeated process of empowerment through

their authentic and trusting relationships with and emotional support for PPs. This is the cornerstone of the whole process of LWD's rights-based empowerment.

In addition, LWD has ingeniously utilised CBOs as a platform for rights-based empowerment. PPs' involvement in CBOs has created disorienting dilemmas and opportunities for actually dealing with CCs, both of which have been conducive to triggering TL. CBOs have also provided the space for mutual learning (which constitutes reflective discourse and communicative learning in TL) and peer support (which functions as emotional support, authentic and trusting relationships, and social recognition) for fostering TL. In particular, speaking out in the gatherings in CBOs has created a disorienting dilemma for PPs, and the aforementioned meaningful relationships among CBO members and with CEFs have been instrumental in supporting such attempts. Such spaces for mutual learning and peer support might compensate for the lack of the preconditions (Mezirow, 2000) and cognitive maturity (Merriam, 2004) required for TL among rural Cambodians.

On the other hand, 'learning by doing' as instrumental learning has not only enhanced PPs' capacities but also brought about perspective transformation where the PPs have gained more confidence; in other words, enhanced agency. Namely, LWD has encouraged PPs to 'learn by doing,' through which they have transformed their perspectives in order to claim their rights from or to question CCs, thereby ultimately enhancing the accountability of CCs and hence influencing the structure. As analysed in the previous chapter, it is LWD that has created such space for interactions by working closely with CCs.

Uniquely, instead of the didactic preaching of abstract rights notions, LWD's human rights training has helped PPs to connect rights with their realities, thereby enabling them to develop a critical consciousness of TL and gradually moving their rights understanding toward existing rights instruments. LWD has also used dialogical processes to raise PPs' critical consciousness. Consequently, their increased understanding of rights has led to their enhanced confidence in claiming these.

Finally, the reflexivity of PPs has been influenced by the authoritarian and hierarchical social structures and governed by the legacy of conflicts. When they practised their rights, PPs were initially afraid, then had mixed feelings and eventually mustered their courage, indicating the gradual process of perspective transformation. In such a precarious state of limbo, the peer support from fellow PPs and the repeated

empowerment made available by CEFs' continuous presence in villages have been essential for their increased exercise of agency.

Chapter 7: Dealing with Land Grabbing

7.1 Introduction

Globally approximately 227 million hectares of developing countries' land—the same size as Western Europe—has been conceded to investors over the last decade (Oxfam, 2011) and that land can possibly feed a billion people (Oxfam, 2012). Whilst there has been an increasing demand for the world market (Adnan, 2011), in particular investors' interest in land dramatically increased in 2007 and 2008 when food prices went up (Deininger, 2011; Oxfam, 2011; Oxfam, 2012). In addition, neo-liberal policies, encouraged particularly by the World Bank, have put lands in developing countries into commercial use, ultimately for exporting goods (Newell, 2006; Adnan, 2011). Along this line there is the argument where through large-scale land acquisitions the rural poor will have access to better technology and more jobs and the precondition for economic development can be created, whilst large-scale land acquisitions are often found in “countries with weak land rights protection” and bring “limited benefits and in many cases negative impact due to weak processes and limited capacity” of the relevant government institutions (Deininger, 2011, p. 217). According to International Land Coalition (2011), large-scale land acquisitions become large-scale land grabs when they are all or any of the following:

- (i) in violation of human rights, particularly the equal rights of women; (ii) not based on free, prior and informed consent of the affected land-users; (iii) not based on a thorough assessment, or are in disregard of social, economic and environmental impacts, including the way they are gendered; (iv) not based on transparent contracts that specify clear and binding commitments about activities, employment and benefits sharing, and; (v) not based on effective democratic planning, independent oversight and meaningful participation.²⁸

This chapter seeks to understand the process by which LWD has influenced the agency of its project participant (PPs) in dealing with land grabbing in the name of economic land concessions (ELCs) in the context of the complex interplay between their agency and the emergent property where the interests of political elites and the economically powerful, the global demand for lands, and the agenda of the neo-liberal multinational donors have converged. To begin with, I will provide the contextual

²⁸ Pages unnumbered.

background of Cambodia's land grabbing. Then the capacity and knowledge-building efforts by LWD, which can lead to greater confidence of PPs to deal with land grabbing, will be analysed. Next, the occasions of LWD's direct involvement in assisting PPs affected by land grabbing will be identified. Following that, I will problematise the powerlessness of local government in relation to ELC deals, despite the fact that PPs claim their land rights through them. Subsequently, the PPs' mental distance from concessionaries will be examined. Then, I will explore the idea of RBA as a long-term process rather than immediate outcomes in terms of the relational interplay between the agency of citizens and the neo-patrimonial structure. Finally, I will delve into global neoliberalism's complicity with neo-partimonialism as generative mechanisms for land grabbing.

The central argument of this chapter is that whilst PPs persistently fear the concessionaries, LWD's conscientisation and capacity development efforts at least foster their confidence and readiness to deal with land grabbing. In addition, whilst land grabbing is at the heart of neo-patrimonialism, posing powerful constraints to citizens' exercise of agency, the conscientised and better equipped citizens might be able to bring about the subtle transformation of such neo-patrimonial structures through their exercise of rights.

As a background, in the villages of one of the two research sites there appear to be one foreign plantation company and one company co-owned by a foreign investor and a relative of a member of the central political elite, which grow a different cash crop from each other. They have been operating since 2009 and 2010 respectively. As mentioned in Chapter three, I collected the data related to land grabbing only in this research site, for the variations of contexts related to theoretical density, as the other research site did not have that issue. Hence, the data in this chapter are significantly smaller than those in the previous two analytical chapters, which I obtained from both research sites. Nonetheless, the data, together with the literature, show some insight into the processes of land grabbing and people's learning associated with it.

7.2 Background of Cambodia's Economic Land Concessions

7.2.1 Current State, History and Practice

The Cambodian government holds around 75-80% of the country's total land area as state land (USAID, 2011). Such land is further categorised into state public land,

which should be preserved, and state private land, which can be put to use for various types of concessions. Cambodia's ELCs, "a mechanism to grant private state land through a specific economic land concession contract to a concessionaire to use for agricultural and industrial-agricultural exploitation" (Council for the Development of Cambodia, n.d., Article 2), currently covers over 50% of arable land in Cambodia (Neef et al., 2013). As a result, it is estimated that only 1% of Cambodia's population owns approximately 30% of the country's land (UNCDF, 2010).

The root of recently rampant land grabbing in the form of ELCs can be traced back to the abolition of private land ownership, and the destruction of all cadastral documents together with the cadastral authority, during the socialist Khmer Rouge regime (Un & So, 2011; Oldenburg & Neef, 2013). After the privatisation of land rights in 1989, most of the Cambodians just received the receipt slips of their land registration applications, but their land was not officially registered due to the government's limited human and technical resources at that time, thus engendering land conflicts (So, 2011; Un & So, 2011). Subsequently, land was transferred between people with local officials as a witness yet without official registration because of continuously ineffective and corrupt (due to neo-patrimonialism) cadastral authorities as well as the costs and time for people to travel to their offices (So, 2011; Un & So, 2011). Hence, people's right to land is based on occupancy—either as a long-held social convention or customary law—not on a legal foundation, leaving their land tenure insecure (So, 2011; Un & So, 2011). The 1992 Land Law stipulated that if land was held for five years, their right to land by possession could be transformed into formal land titles (Un & So, 2011). However, politically powerful and wealthy individuals, with better access to information and state services, did not miss this opportunity to maximise their land acquisition by quickly converting land, which they claimed to possess but actually others had already possessed, into ownership (Un & So, 2011).

The 2001 Land Law, which was enacted partly as a result of the pressure from the World Bank with its neo-liberal policies, formalised ELCs and the 2005 Sub-Decree 146 on ELCs engendered a new boom of land concessions (Neef et al., 2013). Without proper oversight mechanisms, ELCs were faced, most notably, with the political problem where state public lands had been transformed into state private lands, which could be used for concessions, through the rent-seeking complicity between central political elites and domestic and foreign investors (Un & So, 2011). This has opened up

the vast space for people's land by possession to be grabbed legally by the politically and economically powerful. Decisions on ELC deals are made at the central government level, leaving local government (provincial, district, commune and village) unable to have a say in them.

What Neef (2013) calls "the extra-legal and non-transparent character of ELC deals" can be found in the various facets of ELCs (p. 16). For example, discretionary ELC deals, most of the time, do not conduct social and environmental impact assessments and prior consultation with villages, and take a very short time to be approved (Neef et al., 2013; Oldenburg & Neef, 2013). In addition, the judicial system in Cambodia is unfair, politically biased and corrupt, thereby offering virtually no help to the victims of land grabbing but instead posing a risk to them (for example, imprisonment); thus people have to either solve issues at the local level or bring them to the national level (So, 2011).

7.2.2 Social Land Concessions

Social Land Concession (SLC) is "a legal mechanism to transfer private state land for social purposes to the poor who lack land for residential and/or family farming purposes" (The Royal Government of Cambodia, 2003, p. 1) and was enacted, together with ELC, under the 2001 Land Law. The World Bank has been the key counterpart to the Cambodian government in this initiative and the Land Allocation for Social and Economic Development (LASED), the pilot project for SLCs, was created with financial and technical support from the bank (Neef et al., 2013). LWD has been working on SLCs to provide land to the landless poor in their programme sites under LASED and being financed by the bank since 2008 (Life with Dignity, 2013). However, the overall picture is such that land distributed under SLCs is considerably smaller (around 14,000 hectares) than lands granted to domestic and multinational companies through ELCs (more than 2,000,000 hectares) (Neef et al., 2013; Sareth, 2013). In addition, the case study by Neef et al. (2013) finds that SLCs are intended not for pro-poor development but for maintaining the Cambodian government's patronage power through superficially benevolent land distribution and for diverting attention from land grabbing in the form of ELCs. From the following section on, the result of the grounded theory (GT) analysis will be presented.

7.3 Capacity and Knowledge Building

In this context, LWD has been building up the capacities and knowledge of project participants to deal with land grabbing by concessionaries. Confidence, which the PPs gain through their capacity and knowledge development, enables them to deal with land grabbing. Although only one PP explicitly referred to the term ‘confidence’, the testimonies of a few LWD staff from a wide range of organisational levels and another PP’s action in grappling with local government over a land issue, as told in her testimony, appear to confirm this (Life story interview, Sophol Inn 2). The former—a village development committee (VDC) member—actually lost some of her land and was compensated at the price of \$100 per hectare by the company and now maintains as follows:

Research Assistant: Last time because you had no experience in communicating with the village leader or the CC, you received only \$100 [per hectare]. If it [land grabbing] happened again, what would you do?

Respondent: I would ask for the full price of \$250 or \$200 like other people. Now I could contact the commune chief by phone or I could go to his house directly. Before I had little knowledge and I didn’t know what to do. If it happened now, I would not allow my land to be taken away like last time. Even if I could not ask for a high price, at least it has to be a reasonable price. One hectare was sold just at \$100, which was very cheap (Interview, Jorani Tan 3, comments in brackets added).

Faced with crises, people normally react or cope, feeling anger or terror, without transforming their perspectives (Green, 2011; Hoggan, 2011; Jarvis, 2011). It is only later that they may reflect on their experiences and may transform their meaning perspectives (Green, 2011; Hoggan, 2011; Jarvis, 2011). Although it is unlikely that immediate perspective transformation would occur, “sketching out new perspectives and playing with new paths of meaning may be an important phase in gaining distance to one’s previous ways of thinking, and enabling later readiness to step on these paths” (Mälkki, 2012, p. 224), as evidenced in the above dialogue.

Similarly to the findings in Chapters five and six, PPs’ knowledge of rights and laws contributed to their confidence in grappling with the companies, according to the above two PPs, one CEF and one senior LWD staff. During land rights awareness activities, PPs are reminded that if they hold land for five years, they could claim their right to the land, backed up by, for instance, local authorities as witness and community land maps (Email interview, Sovann Vy, 17 October 2013). Through those occasions,

LWD also encourages them to be firm on their claims and be organised for forging collective power (Email interview, Sovann Vy, 17 October 2013). Deininger (2011) and Newell (2006) point out that citizens should not only be educated about their land rights but also be equipped to use their rights efficaciously in order to contest land grabbing.

In addition to the general confidence and capacity-building efforts analysed in Chapter six, LWD shows PPs some practical approaches through which they can claim their right to land. Such approaches include the formation of groups and networks, and holding demonstrations. The formation of groups and networks is basically to generate ‘power with’ for dealing with issues through local government or dealing with companies directly. CBOs, wherein reflective discourse is encouraged, are the basis for such solidarity and collective actions (Brookfield, 2000; Merriam et al., 2007). In some of its programme sites, LWD helps PPs form advocacy networks starting from village-level Advocacy Focus Persons to commune- and provincial-level networks. The following testimony of a non-sample CEF illustrates the power of this approach:

I used to see one region in which all the people in the commune, which is composed of three villages, cooperated well and dared to claim their rights. They claimed, for example, the company went into the villages for construction at night. The people also went to sleep there at night, waiting for them [the company]. And they also called all the networks that supported their rights-claiming and, as a result, their struggle ended with success (Focus group (FG) interview, Sopheat Pan, comments in brackets added).

Collective actions beyond people’s own villages, where there are kinship relationships and emerging village associations, are particularly weak, mainly because of the deep distrust implanted during the Khmer Rouge regime (Centre for Advanced Study, 2006). In this sense, LWD’s encouragement to build bridging social capital among affected villages to enhance negotiation power for dealing with companies and government fills this gap. If PPs deal with issues through commune councils (CCs) and these do not respond, LWD suggests to the PPs to that they consider the possibility of demonstration in order to solicit responses from district and provincial governments. These approaches are reminiscent of the Freirean approach where “it is collectively that people not only solve problems but, moreover, transform their sociopolitical conditions” (Finger & Asun, 2001, p. 86). The cross-cutting method for these approaches is peaceful advocacy with non-violent words and deeds, as analysed in Chapter five. The other practical approach that LWD advises its PPs to take is to network with human rights NGOs at the

provincial level first and then at the national level, as well as with media such as TV and newspapers.

All these approaches are commonly recommended as citizens' strategies to deal with land grabbing (Centre for Advanced Study, 2006; Polack et al., 2013). Such multi-pronged strategies are said to be more effective than a single form of strategy because of the particular and ever-shifting context of land grabbing and the synergy between these strategies (Newell, 2006; Adnan, 2007).

The above-mentioned approaches are an example of where LWD intervention has been done in such a way as to equip PPs with the concrete knowledge and skills necessary for taking social actions—namely, community organising and mobilisation and networking beyond the village-level to generate wider collective voices. Such hopeful and practical alternatives are needed, as PPs transform their perspectives in the face of the harsh reality of land grabbing, which can paralyse them (Lange, 2004). As seen in Chapter five, LWD, from its experience, has learned not to act on behalf of its PPs for land grabbing problems, and to just point out the ways in which they can deal with such problems on their own.

7.4 LWD's Direct Involvement

In spite of this 'hands-off' approach by LWD, there are some occasions when it is more directly involved in assisting PPs. LWD brings some critical cases to the national-level networks to appeal to the central government. Such networks include the national-level NGO network on land issues and the government-led technical working group on land with the participation of UN agencies and international NGOs (Email interview, Tinekor Meas, 8 October 2013). In addition, LWD was chosen as one of the 13 NGOs that are allowed to have an annual discussion with the Council of Ministers, the cabinet of Cambodia, because of its development achievement and close working relationship with the government, and through this occasion LWD tries to influence government policies (Email interview, Tinekor Meas, 8 October 2013). It also organises district-level land forums with local (provincial, district, commune and village) government and where possible possibly with a human rights NGO. Forums function not only as the venues for information dissemination on land issues (for example, land registration) for villagers, but also and more importantly as spaces where villagers can

bring land issues to duty-bearers (Interview, Inn Sin). Such forums seem to be made available by LWD's strategy of working with local government.

7.5 Claiming Land Rights through Local Government

Both PPs and LWD staff from all the organisational levels made much mention of the fact that PPs make petitions to local government to intervene in land grabbing. More specifically, they bring issues first to villager leaders, who then bring these to the CCs, and finally the CCs bring them to the district offices (DOs). It seems that generally local government, especially CCs, try to intervene in problems, according to one CEF, one senior LWD staff and the district development plan formulated by the research district²⁹. On the other hand, as mentioned earlier, in terms of their mandate CCs are actually excluded from dealing with issues and conflicts related to land (Blunt & Turner, 2005; Heng et al., 2011; Plummer & Tritt, 2012). Nevertheless, CCs are compelled to support citizens, especially to maintain popularity for their re-election; otherwise they are likely to be voted out the next time (Plummer & Tritt, 2012). One non-project villager said that there have been incidents where villagers' cows strayed into the company's plantation field and were consequently charged a high penalty for recovering their cows (Interview, Simach Vichea). His perception is that for such cases, the CC should intervene:

The CC should understand the feeling of villagers, when their cows enter the company's land. They [villagers] said that when their cows were caught [by the company] and they were asked to pay a penalty, the villagers wanted the CC to help solve the problem (Interview, Simach Vichea, comments in brackets added).

On the other hand, being supportive to citizens affected by ELCs entails risks and actually Plummer and Tritt (2012) found that one councillor, who had also lost his land, joined the protest and was eventually imprisoned and removed from the party list and his council position.

²⁹ To anonymise the district name, I have not referenced this document.

7.6 Local Government Powerless Against ELC

Nonetheless, local governments (CCs and DOs) have ambivalent attitudes toward ELC deals made at the central government level. The testimony of the commune chief of the research site clearly shows such ambivalence:

I would like to clarify that investment always has adverse effects. And the resolutions to these problems were not perfect. But in the light of the benefits from the company which is investing, although it really brings about adverse effects, the majority of the villagers have received wages from the company, which are sufficient. Some of those villagers have jobs, and they can live because of the wages. Every day, thousands of [US] dollars per day are coming into my commune (Interview, Nhean Hy, comments in brackets added).

This falls within the official discursive justification of ELC deals by government, in that ELCs are for ‘job creation’ and ‘economic development’ (Schneider, 2011; Neef et al., 2013). In a similar vein, in the district development plan, whilst the reduction of land conflicts and the provision of courses on land rights are mentioned, there is an antithetical mention of attracting business investments and allocating some zones for such investments. On the other hand, when asked about ELCs, the district chief oddly started doodling in his notebook and his face became serious, perhaps indicating his nervousness. Then he said:

There has been no problem with people’s land. They do not work on their private land. It is because they live on state land. If people live on state land, they can still be granted that land. But if companies want to buy that land, then government prepares another land for people and transfers them to such land. If people fenced state land, but some part of the land is not used, then government does not allow the idle part of the land to be occupied by them (Interview, Bunnath Prum).

This too falls within the official discourse of government for ELCs in that government only grants ‘state lands’ to companies and tries to recover ‘non-used land’ (Neef et al., 2013). Jessop (2001) argues, in relation to his strategic-relational approach (SRA), that “discursive paradigms privilege some interlocutors, some discursive identities/positioning, some discursive strategies and tactics, and some discursive statements over others” (p. 1225). These official discursive justifications indicate ELCs as a favoured structurally-inscribed selective.

The land transfer for those who lived on ‘state lands’ mentioned by the district chief was actually an SLC, as he went on to say:

Government facilitated the transfer of lands to them. 400 families who do not have land are in the process of SLC. LWD provides materials and information for people in this SLC (Interview, Bunnath Prum).

As mentioned, SLCs are intended not necessarily for pro-poor development but primarily for the maintenance of the Cambodian government’s patronage power through superficially benevolent land distribution and for diverting the attention from land grabbing in the form of ELCs (Neef et al., 2013). In other words, the hidden agenda of SLCs is that the Cambodian government keeps benefiting from ELCs for the maintenance of its neo-patrimonialism and uses SLCs as a passive revolution, the acceptance of certain demands of citizens to prevent their hegemony from being challenged (Sassoon, 1982), to bring about the consensual domination—the ideological dominance of the values and norms (Carnoy, 1984)—of its citizens. The World Bank, which initially pressured the Cambodian government to launch ELCs, now has an ambivalent stance between the pro-poor development, including the protection of citizens’ land rights, and its usual neo-liberal economic growth ideology through ELCs (Oldenburg & Neef, 2013). The bank supports SLCs, and LWD is involved in SLCs financed by the bank. Hence, the bank and LWD can be considered complicit in the Cambodian government’s effort to maintain its neo-patrimonialism. As in the case of the decentralisation reforms, LWD does not seem to problematise the Cambodian People’s Party’s (CPP) neo-patrimonial generative mechanisms and intention behind SLCs. Perhaps this is the limitation of LWD as a development NGO which emerged in the depoliticised climate and thus it takes superficially benevolent policies like the decentralisation reforms and SLCs at face value. Or perhaps it has become somewhat blind to the neo-patrimonial generative mechanisms and intentions in its efforts to ‘work with government.’³⁰

On the other hand, the reality is such that local government—CCs and DOs—cannot do anything about the exploitations through ELCs. When asked how the CC helped solve the land issues with the ELCs, the commune chief’s voice became quieter and he started looking nervous, saying:

³⁰ I sent an email to two senior management staff of LWD to inquire about LWD’s stance on the stated criticism of SLCs, but received no reply from them.

Commune chief: The commune has already been trying its best, as I have just told you. For what the commune can do, the commune will just do based on the commune's ability. If it is related to the big companies and the commune cannot solve it, the commune reports to the higher level in order to let the higher level solve it.

Researcher: Okay, will the district handle the issue? Is the district able to solve the issue?

Commune chief: [They] solve those problems, as I have just said, it is possible. [But] if we talk about the villagers who accepted those [solutions], they are not satisfied, they accepted [those] with regret. If they do not take those, they will get nothing (Interview, Nhean Hy, comments in brackets added).

Plummer and Tritt (2012) find that CCs are torn between their accountability to the citizens and their accountability to high-ranking national actors involved in ELC deals.

Un and So (2011) find “a payment of approximately US \$500 in informal fees to government officials at various levels for each hectare approved by the ELC” (p. 299). On the other hand, the official rental fees for concessionaries are extremely low and range from two to ten US dollars per hectare per year (Oldenburg & Neef, 2013). This may confirm Un and So's (2011) insights into the informal revenue for consolidating the political legitimacy of the CPP through the informal service delivery by its working groups: “discretionary concessions of land to big businesses generate revenues which, when combined with contributions from government officials, fund patronage-based distributive politics via service and infrastructure provision in populated rural areas” (p. 308). Hence, land grabbing in the form of ELCs is at the heart of the neo-patrimonialism for central political elites. Neo-patrimonialism, combined with the strong commercial interest of investors in land, appears to create a powerful generative mechanism, against which local government cannot do anything.

7.7 Mental Distance from Concessionaries

Villagers in the research site fear the companies, due to their vivid memory of when their own or their relatives' land and livelihoods have been affected by land grabbing. In Photo 4 of the Venn diagram exercise with FFS members, from the left, the flipcharts indicate 2005, 2009 and 2011. The coloured circles represent the village (yellow), the CC (blue), the DO (green) and the companies (pink). Notice that companies are placed farther from the village than the CC and the DO although their distance to the village has been shortened between 2009 and 2012. In addition, the FFS

members perceived the status of the concessionary to be larger than those of the CC and the DO. One of the FFS members who participated in the exercise said:

Between 2005 and 2009 the village and the DO got closer. But the company was very far because we did not dare to argue with the company, because [we were] afraid of them (FG interview, Chantrea Nimol, comments in brackets added).

A number of villagers also indicated their fear of the companies even at the time of the fieldwork. One of them actually said during the interview that she was afraid that other villagers might hear her speaking about land grabbing (Interview, Veata Loun), another started talking quietly when asked about ELC issues, and one of the villager leaders became nervous and defensive in his response when asked about the same topic. Moreover, as mentioned, even after land was taken and plantation fields were set up, there is still on-going anxiety among villagers stemming from the fact that villagers' cows straying into the plantation fields are caught by the companies.



Photo 4: Venn Diagram Results from the First Research Site

According to villagers and LWD staff from all organisational levels, it seemed difficult for villagers to claim back land from those companies when they first encountered land grabbing. One of the VDC members stated:

The company took my uncle's land and they gave him only \$50 per hectare. At that time, if the high ranking officials knew those [whose land was grabbed], the company would have given them \$200 or \$300 per hectare. For my uncle and other villagers who were afraid to talk to the company, the company gave only \$50 or \$100 per hectare. And if we complained, they said to the commune that they would kill one or two people who complained. After hearing that, my uncle just accepted whatever amount of money the company gave him (Interview, Veata Loun).

A village health volunteer in one of the research villages said that she had rights except for land rights and that if they protested to the companies, they would be imprisoned (Interview, Samnag Khoeun). Such intimidation and pressure tactics are also documented in Schneider (2011). Hence, victims of land grabbing are faced with the very strong power of constraint generated by the neo-patrimonial structure.

In addition to fear, their lack of the necessary knowledge and skills to deal with the companies made them unable to claim back their land, according to two LWD staff and one VDC member. The VDC member said that she did not know how to communicate with the village leader and the CC about the land grabbing issue with which she was faced (Interview, Jorani Tan 3) and a non-sample CEF pointed out that one reason why people were not able to negotiate for a higher amount of compensation is that they did not collectively negotiate with the companies (FG, Sopheat Pan). This is the gap which LWD's capacity-building intervention has attempted to fill, as discussed earlier.

Two PPs explicitly expressed their hatred of the companies. A VDC member, part of whose land was taken by one company, indicated her quiet resistance to them:

I am not happy with that company. Since it came, my villagers rushed to work for it. It is just like, they work for the company and do not think about their own work. For me, I do not like [the company] and thus do not work for the company. I would rather garden, feed pigs, feed chickens, and farm my own rice field. I work for myself and do not work as a slave, in order to avoid being blamed for leaving our land as forests [namely, idle land] and not transforming those forest land into rice fields. Because they [the company] are greedy, half a hectare of

their [villagers'] land was taken. If we do not work for others and work for ourselves, we can farm and garden and earn enough money (Interview, Jorani Tan 1, comments in brackets added).

One of the reasons why she could farm, raise livestock and earn enough income was that she was a member of FFS and the village bank (credit scheme). In other words, she has established a strong livelihood base through LWD's service-delivery intervention, despite the fact that part of her land was grabbed, and she was indeed a model case of LWD's empowerment. Nielsen (2012) asserts that broad-based development projects like the ones she has been involved in help sustain the empowerment process, and Kabeer (2011) maintains that such projects enable people to be independent from the charity of the powerful, thereby putting them in a better position to challenge injustice. Having said this, generally those whose land was taken by companies resist working for the companies (Neef et al., 2013; Interview, Staff of the NGO engaging with land grabbing issues, 31 May 2013). Another VDC member, whose relative's land was taken by the company, also expressed her hatred of it:

The land has been lost, and there is no forest for herding the cattle. There has been a lot of change. In the past, it was easier. We could freely let cows go for two or three nights without worrying, and we could find them in the forest. But now, if cows go missing for three or four nights, no need to look for them because they have been eaten [by the staff of the company] (Interview, Veata Loun, comments in brackets added).

However, due to drought and the lack of their capacities to farm and earn an income, more villagers in her village including herself started working for the companies between my first and second fieldworks (Interview, Jorani Tan 4). Two additional members in her VDC started working for the companies also, although three months before, none of the VDC members had worked for the company (Interview, Jorani Tan 4). There had been no water even in ponds, which stopped villagers from farming, and their children had been falling ill (Interview, Jorani Tan 4). This calamity forced them to work for the companies (Interview, Jorani Tan 4).

7.8 Citizens' Closer Relationship with Companies

Despite villagers' continued fear and hatred of the companies, analysed above, the Venn diagram exercise unexpectedly showed that the mental distance between the

companies and the villages had been shortened between 2009 and 2012. There are some indications where the companies have become aware of villagers' grievances, given the widespread resistance to land grabs. For example, now they seem to pay proper amounts of compensation (FG, multiple FFS members in the first research site³¹, 3 April 2012). In addition, they appear to inform villagers and local authorities in advance about land concessions (Interview, Phhoung Hout 2). This practice seems uncommon, though, as Oldenburg and Neef (2013) find that generally the companies do not generally conduct legally mandatory consultations with affected villagers nor, in many instances, does the central government inform local authorities about ELC deals in advance. Moreover, one of the LWD's senior staff testified that recently some villagers recovered their land from the companies, and the companies cannot ignore villagers' voices (Interview, Song Heng). However, given the fact that only the permanent fields such as wet-rice fields or plantations, have been returned to people, and not the swidden fields, fallows and community-managed land (for example, pastures and forests), and in the light of the continuing disrespect of human rights and customary land tenure rights, it should be modestly interpreted as meaning that concessionaries have become aware of people's grievances rather than respecting their rights (Email interview, Researcher specialised in land grabbing in Cambodia, 19 December 2013).

Furthermore, a number of villagers said the companies created jobs for them. Brüntrup et al. (2013) and Saleno (2011) argue that it is important to acknowledge such positive sides of ELCs and that there may be potential for pro-poor development in contexts where there is only smallholding agriculture and the failure of government to provide infrastructure, facilities and employment. On the other hand, Neef et al. (2013) quote a more sceptical comment made by a consultant who was involved in LASED, along the lines of the neo-liberal character of multinational companies:

I don't trust the Chinese and Vietnamese 'business partner.' They want to maximise profits. Period. (p. 15).

The employment of many villagers by the companies partly brought about the low participation of villagers in LWD's programme due to their work with the companies, as in the case of the three VDC members who started working for the

³¹ The transcriber was unable to identify the respondents.

company due to the severe drought mentioned earlier. This low turnout appeared to be undermining LWD's efforts to build the confidence and capacities of its PPs to deal with land grabbing.

7.9 RBA as a Process Rather Than a Success³²

A couple of senior staff at LWD claimed that they considered RBA as processes rather than results. As discussed thus far, it is indeed hard for villagers to claim back land from the companies. Given this fact, as long as villagers 'practise their rights' through the formation of groups and networks, demonstrations, petitions to local government, and networking with human rights NGOs and the media, LWD considers that the rights-based empowerment of villagers are successful in terms of processes and their perspective transformation (Interviews, Sophat Um 2; Sovann Vy).

From the critical realist perspective, citizens' practice of rights is considered to be the exercise of their agency that can bring about gradual shifts in an oppressive structure. This seems to be happening in LWD's programme sites, especially in citizens' relationship to local government, as discussed in the previous chapters. Similarly, as evidenced by the concessionaries' awareness of citizens' grievances, the increasing resistance by Cambodians in their opposition to land grabs, has had some effect, despite its imperfect exercise (Schneider, 2011). At the national level, there has been some setback for aggressive land grabbing, as evidenced in Prime Minister Hun Sen's initiative for a moratorium on ELCs in May 2012, immediately followed by the land-titling scheme implemented by youth volunteers whereby state land occupied by families would be excised from ELC deals; both of these were done primarily to win the following year's national election (Milne, 2013; Neef et al., 2013). However, these seemingly benevolent policy shifts should be viewed with caution and more crudely regarded as the neo-patrimonial government paying lip service to such reforms, as strategies to stay in power (Milne, 2013; Email interview, Researcher specialised in land grabbing in Cambodia, 19 December 2013).

Faced with land grabbing, Cambodians appear to simply react against it (Plummer & Tritt, 2012; Interview, Activist for land grabbing in Cambodia, 16 March

³² This was a concept in GT analysis, but because of its important implications not only for this chapter but also for the other analytical chapters, I elevated it to a category.

2012), often without any skills and knowledge to deal effectively with an issue.

Plummer and Tritt (2012) also state:

Despite a cultural hesitation toward confrontation and complaint at one level, when livelihoods are threatened and when people have a strong sense of injustice, there is no lack of willingness to speak out. (p. 39).

Their only other choice is to turn to resistance (Schneider, 2011). As discussed, this is the natural behaviour for those faced with crises. On the other hand, this study has shown that people may withdraw from negotiating with companies because of intimidation by the powerful. Thus it seems that Cambodians either speak out or leave when faced with land grabbing. Even though there are possibilities of influencing local and national level structures to a certain extent as mentioned above, generally it does not seem to have yielded immediate success, and local government cannot offer any meaningful intervention, given that ELC deals are approved at the central government level.

Whether people are faced with actual pressure tactics and intimidation or lack skills and knowledge to deal with land grabbing, it appears at least sensible for them to be prepared and equipped to contest current and prospective land grabbing. In addition to the general confidence and capacity building analysed in the previous chapter, LWD has been equipping its PPs with practical knowledge and skills to deal with land grabbing—particularly about the formation of groups and alliances. For the particular reference to group formation, Kabeer and Huq (2010) and Kabeer et al. (2013) contend that it is the power of solidarity forged over the years that people can draw on in confronting the powerful who violate their rights. Conscientised and better equipped collectives might still not be able to bring about immediate victory over the solid oppressive structures associated with land grabbing, but they might be able to bring about the subtle transformation of such structures through their brave and tactical interactions with the powerful. For example, the CPP's loss of parliamentary seats in the 2013 national elections was partly attributed to citizens' frustration over pervasive land grabbing (Hughes, 2013).

At the individual household level, this may mean that whilst they lose their land, they may obtain some concessions from companies, such as proper amounts of compensation and the return of part of their grabbed land. Furthermore, democratic

spaces amenable to such interactions have been created by LWD's strategy of working with the government. Polack et al. (2013) argue from the experiences of African land grabbing that:

giving people a say should not wait until an investment project comes in—it should be part and parcel of rural development. Vehicles for doing this would include the participatory formulation of a shared vision for rural development, participatory land use planning and zoning, and public participation in law reforms. This approach would place citizens in a better position to articulate their vision when consultations about a specific investment proposal are initiated. (p. 53).

This alleviates the socio-political impediments to TL, as mentioned in Chapter five.

This kind of empowering process and opening up of democratic spaces takes time (Nielsen, 2012). Hence LWD's long-term intervention plays the role of preparing citizens to deal with possible land grabbing.

7.10 Global Neoliberalism's Complicity with Neo-patrimonialism

As seen in the previous section, LWD has attempted to empower its PPs to claim their rights in the context of land grabbing. On the other hand, it has worked with SLCs, which were designed to maintain the Cambodian government's patronage power by parsimoniously distributing government land to the landless and to divert people's attention from land grabbing (Neef et al., 2013). Hence, in a sense it seems meaningless to empower its PPs to contest land grabbing whilst simultaneously through SLCs, LWD and the Cambodian government are complicit in pacifying Cambodians' frustration with land grabbing.

Additionally, to be more comprehensive in our analysis, we still need to further trace the other strand of the generative mechanisms for land grabbing, namely the neoliberal structure associated with neo-patrimonialism. Springer (2011) argues that Cambodia's political elites and their patronage networks have been using neoliberalism for their own benefits: "the patronage system has allowed local elites to co-opt, transform, and (re)articulate neoliberal reforms through a framework which asset strips public resources, thereby increasing people's exposure to corruption, coercion, and violence" (p. 2554). The authoritarian and neo-patrimonial Cambodian government and the neoliberal superstructure—including the World Bank's neoliberal policy and the interests of domestic and international business elites, induced by the increasing global

resource demand—have converged, thereby becoming an emergent property. This has caused the privatisation of state public land and consequently engendered pervasive land grabbing, thereby posing the very powerful generative mechanism to Cambodians. In fact, this phenomenon is symptomatic of the larger neoliberalisation process in Cambodia. The Cambodian government has employed the discursive justification of ‘order,’ stability,’ and ‘security’ over citizens’ rights and democracy in order to facilitate market stability for neoliberal reforms and to fulfil the interests of elites, which has been implicitly supported by the neoliberal donor community since the Paris Peace Accords back in 1991 (Springer, 2010). Such consensual domination has been utilised to justify the government’s authoritarianism in the form of violence from above as in the case of land grabbing (Springer, 2010).

As a result, the voices of ordinary citizens are excluded from any agenda-setting happening on these structures. According to Fraser (2009), such a lack of representation at the meta-political level occurs “when states and transnational elites monopolise the activity of frame-setting, denying voice to those who may be harmed in the process, and blocking creation of democratic arenas where the latter’s claims can be vetted and redressed” (p. 26). This consensual domination needs to be countered by the war of position, a battle at the level of consciousness and perception, of not only citizens but also and more importantly of LWD, an agent of rights-based social transformation. LWD should have been at the forefront of “struggles for meta-political democracy” (Fraser, 2009, p. 27), but sadly its depoliticised roots seem to have hampered it from fulfilling that role.

7.11 Conclusion

This chapter has depicted the challenges for and the potential of LWD’s intervention to enable its PPs to deal with land grabbing. Citizens still fear the concessionaries. It was difficult for them to claim back their land from those companies when they first encountered land grabbing. They either reacted without adequate knowledge and skills to deal with the issue or withdrew because of intimidation and pressure tactics. In other words, they were faced with the power of constraint generated by the neo-patrimonial structure without being adequately equipped to deal with such power.

Through its intervention, LWD is attempting to fill this gap in the capacities and confidence of those who have experienced land grabbing as well as of those who have not encountered it yet, for possible future cases of land grabbing. Specifically, LWD equips the PPs to use land rights efficaciously, to submit their petitions to local government, to form groups and alliances, to organise demonstrations, and to network with human rights NGOs and media. Such conscientisation—namely TL—particularly through a better grasp of rights and capacity development efforts, fosters PPs' confidence and readiness to contest land grabbing. This, together with the opening up of democratic spaces by LWD's strategy to work with government, which alleviates the socio-political impediments to TL, places PPs in a better position to deal with future land grabbing. In addition, if it is done effectively, the strengthening of the PPs' livelihood through LWD's development programme helps not only in sustaining such empowerment processes but also in enabling them to resist the charity of companies in the form of employment opportunities.

Conscientised and better equipped citizens might still not be able to bring about immediate victories over the solid oppressive structures associated with land grabbing, but perhaps could bring about the subtle transformation of such structures through their brave and tactical interactions with the powerful. For example, partly because of citizens' resistance, concessionaries have at least become aware of their grievances.

The concessionaries created jobs for citizens. This reduced the turnout of PPs in the LWD programme, seemingly undermining LWD's efforts to build their confidence and capacities to deal with land grabbing.

However, for some critical land grabbing cases, LWD brings them to the national-level networks to appeal to the central government. It also organises district-level land forums as spaces where citizens can bring land grabbing issues to local government. LWD's close working relationship with the central and local governments has made such direct involvement possible.

Nevertheless, it is to local government that PPs normally present petitions to ask for their intervention in land grabbing issues. CCs in particular do try to intervene in such problems. However, not only do they have an ambivalent attitude towards ELC deals, they can do virtually nothing to halt the exploitation through ELCs. They are in a dilemma between their upward accountability to high-ranking political elites involved in ECL deals and downward accountability to the citizens. More specifically, as mentioned,

land grabbing is at the heart of neo-patrimonialism for such elites, in which they are complicit with land investors.

Finally, whilst LWD does intervene, as mentioned above, to enable citizens to deal with land grabbing, it is involved in SLCs without problematising its hidden intention to divert attention from neo-patrimonial ELCs, indicating its complicity with government in pacifying Cambodians' frustration with ELCs. This analysis has also revealed that the conjunction of global neoliberalism and neo-patrimonialism has formed a very powerful generative mechanism for land grabbing.

Chapter 8: Conclusion

This study sought to understand the limits and possibilities of people's agency in fulfilling their rights to development and the social change that happened as a result of their exercise of agency through LWD's rights-based empowerment in the highly repressive and complex context of rural Cambodia. In particular, this study explored how LWD's unique middle-ground and contextualised rights-based approach (RBA) has made full use of the more democratic spaces made available through decentralisation and harnessed its multi-pronged and largely process-oriented rights-based empowerment approach in order to enhance citizens' agency to claim their rights. The research sites were particular spatio-temporal horizons, in which various processes, such as the decentralisation reforms, neo-patrimonialism, the global food demand, and the agendas of international donors to the Cambodian government and LWD, have converged. Thus this study also explored such complex causal interplays in order to find out how the conjunctions of those forces have influenced people's learning in a move toward fulfilling their rights. In this final chapter I will sketch tentative answers to these central research questions, whilst simultaneously attempting to draw out the methodological and theoretical (namely, agency and transformative learning (TL)) contributions and some implications for RBA.

Unavoidably, this study has limitations, both in terms of its scope and implementation, mainly due to my dual life as a doctoral researcher and a university lecturer and the contingency of the fieldwork. For the former, if time had allowed, this study would have investigated more programme sites (particularly an additional site where land grabbing is prevalent), observed more key events such as a land forum, and conducted more life story interviews to further explore personal transformation, all of which would serve to provide more variations and more confirmation of the findings of this research. For the latter, if time had permitted, I would have immersed myself in the Cambodians' ontological and epistemological frameworks in order to work out how I could solicit better articulations of personal transformation in life story interviews to further delve into such processes. Despite these limitations, I believe that my research has adequately addressed the central research questions, has made a unique contribution to the knowledge base, and drawn out some valuable implications for RBA. Nevertheless, what I claim as knowledge here is inevitably constrained by available

discourses and conceptual and theoretical frameworks and thus should be treated as an open-ended and tentative understanding of the phenomena, in which there is still space for critique (Sayer, 2004a).

This chapter will begin with the methodological contribution of the study. I will then turn to the major findings in the light of the research questions. After that, I will discuss this study's theoretical contribution to the TL theory. Then I will draw conclusions about LWD and its practice. Next, I will draw out important implications for RBA. Finally, I will suggest some further areas for related research.

8.1 Methodological Reflection

In this study I sought to develop a case grounded in the variations of the realities of people on the ground yet vertically informed by macro forces influencing such realities. To do so, I shifted the originally held constructivist ontology and epistemology to critical realism because of the lack of explanatory power of the former especially for the neo-patrimonial structure associated with land grabbing that significantly constrained the acts and influence of people's agency. This shift led me to the adoption of an ethnographic case study with an emerging critical realist grounded theory (GT) approach in order to delve into not only people's perceptions but such generative mechanisms.

In particular, the critical realist lens has enabled me not only to explore the neo-patrimonial structure associated with land grabbing but also to subsequently realise and hence penetrate into the neo-patrimonial structure associated with the decentralisation process, through which I was able to problematise LWD's uncritical acceptance of this seemingly benevolent policy and its resultant promotion of 'thin' social rights. In addition, critical realist GT, which investigates both people's perceptions and social structures, has helped me to analyse the extent to which structures had exercised the powers of constraint over people's reflexivity and the extent to which LWD's project participant (PPs) were able to exercise reflexivity against such powers of constraint in relation to claiming rights from duty-bearers.

8.2 Major Findings

8.2.1 How has LWD's intervention shortened the mental distance between its project participants and duty-bearers?

The decentralisation process itself has shortened the mental distance between citizens and duty-bearers. Cambodian citizens have been drawing on local governance structure made amenable through decentralisation (namely, in exercising their electoral power and their rights to development), and in turn such actions have been bringing about subtle yet steady shifts in the structure.

However, there still exist major deficits between citizens (in terms of capacity and confidence) and CCs (in terms of capacity and accountability). Hence, LWD's middle-ground RBA has been reinforcing the interactions between its PPs and CCs by building the capacities and confidence of PPs, opening up more space for their participation, and building the capacities of CCs. Through such interventions, PPs have been increasingly enabled to claim rights, thereby enhancing the accountability of CCs and hence further influencing the structure.

On the other hand, PPs' mental distance from the economic land concessionaries is wider than from local government. They still fear economic land concessionaries. It was difficult for them to claim back their land from those companies when they first encountered land grabbing. They either reacted without adequate knowledge and skills to deal with the issues or withdrew because of intimidation and pressure tactics.

However and unexpectedly, their mental distance from the concessionaries has been reduced over the last few years. This is because the latter has become aware of citizens' grievances—through their resistance—and has also created jobs for them.

Unlike the decentralisation process, LWD's intervention does not seem to yield immediate results of solving land grabbing. Nonetheless, the conscientisation of PPs, particularly through a better grasp of rights and their capacity development, has fostered their confidence and readiness to contest land grabbing. This, together with the opening up of democratic spaces by LWD's strategy to work with government, has at least placed the PPs in a better position to deal with possible future cases of land grabbing.

8.2.2 How and in what ways has LWD's intervention influenced the agency of project participants in fulfilling their rights to development?

It seems that LWD's process-oriented approach, particularly the high-level facilitation skills of its staff, has been instrumental in furthering the perspective transformation of PPs. In addition, community-based organisations (CBOs) have offered space for mutual learning—which constitutes reflective discourse and communicative learning in TL. On the other hand, it seems that LWD's result-oriented approach, stemming from its subordinate position to donors, has undermined this process-oriented approach to some extent, and this has been manifested in, for example, the dependency attitude of some PPs.

In its human rights training, LWD has used dialogical processes to raise PPs' critical consciousness on rights. Such training has also helped PPs to connect rights with their realities, thereby encouraging them to develop a critical consciousness towards TL and gradually furthering their rights understanding of the existing rights instruments. Consequently, their increased understanding of, or more accurately the internalisation of, rights has led to their enhanced confidence in dealing with local government and land grabbing.

The CEFs' stay in their assigned villages has brought about the repeated process of empowerment through their authentic and trusting relationships with and emotional support for PPs. Moreover, CBOs have provided space for peer support—which functions as emotional support, authentic and trusting relationships, and social recognition for fostering TL. In particular, speaking out in gatherings in CBOs has created a disorienting dilemma for PPs, and the aforementioned meaningful relationships among CBO members and with CEFs are considered instrumental in supporting their attempts to speak out.

PPs' involvement in CBOs has created such disorienting dilemmas as well as opportunities to actually deal with CCs, both of which are conducive to triggering TL. In other words, LWD has encouraged PPs to 'learn by doing,' through which they transform their perspectives to claim their rights from or to question CCs, thereby ultimately enhancing the accountability of CCs and hence influencing the structure. In particular, PPs' acts of speaking out and practising human rights fall within this 'learning by doing' for TL. It is worth noting here that their involvement in CBOs and practising rights have made them actually engage with local government.

As argued above, it was LWD that has created such space for interactions by working closely with local government. This close relationship with local government has also allowed LWD's direct involvement in the issue of land grabbing in the form of land forums, which has provided spaces where citizens can bring such issues to local government. There are other similar types of public forums organised by LWD, such as child rights forums.

Specifically in relation to land grabbing issues, LWD equips PPs to submit their petition to local government, to form groups and alliances, to organise demonstrations, and to network with human rights NGOs and media. Such capacity development efforts foster PPs' confidence and readiness to contest land grabbing. This, together with the opening up of democratic spaces by LWD's strategy of working with government, which alleviates the socio-political impediments to TL, at least places PPs in a better position to deal with future land grabbing.

PPs' instrumental learning about the fulfilment of their basic needs and their economic self-reliance through LWD's development programme has important implications for their agency. First, in a resource-starved context, the fulfilment of their basic needs is a precondition for their perspective transformation towards enhanced agency. In other words, their perspective transformation hinges on their capacity development and resultant improved well-being. Second, if it is done effectively, the fortification of their livelihood through LWD's development programme helps them to quietly resist the charity of concessionaries in the form of employment opportunities.

8.2.3 How have political, economic, social and cultural contexts influenced the project participants' learning in their move towards fulfilling their rights?

The decentralisation process has been a strategically-selective policy of the Cambodian government, thereby offering a favourable spatio-temporal horizon, more specifically the participative and democratic spaces for citizens to learn to exercise their rights to development. However, such spaces tend to be only open to a limited extent for ordinary citizens in terms of actual participation as well as the substance of discussion, thus hindering their learning to exercise their rights in practice. LWD has been trying to fill this democratic deficit at the local government level through its middle-ground RBA, as mentioned earlier. However, delving into the phenomenon in which the neo-patrimonial structure is manifested in the lack of resources in the decentralisation

reforms and as the parallel party financing system, I find it particularly problematic that LWD did not conscientise its PPs to the extent that they could become aware of this passive revolution and consensual domination through decentralisation by the neo-patrimonial government. Such a ‘softly-softly’ RBA inevitably does not penetrate into the structural root cause, whereas this should be at the heart of RBA.

The general attributes of rural Cambodians, such as the resource-scarce conditions as well as the lack of preconditions (Mezirow, 2000) and cognitive maturity (Merriam, 2004), which are known to be required for TL, impose limits on their TL in their move towards claiming their rights. As mentioned earlier, for the resource-scarce conditions, LWD has been building the capacities of PPs in order to meet their basic needs first. For the latter, mutual learning and peer support generated through CBOs might compensate for the likely lack of such preconditions among rural Cambodians.

When PPs practised their rights, they were initially afraid, then had mixed feelings and eventually mustered the courage, indicating the gradual process of their perspective transformation. Such states of mind and feelings indicate that Archer’s (2003) internal conversations have tipped the balance towards the reflexive side, hence enabling PPs to exercise their agency in claiming rights. In such a precarious state of limbo, the peer support from fellow PPs and the repeated empowerment made available by the CEFs’ continuous presence in villages are essential for their increased exercise of agency.

On the other hand, land grabbing—the emergent property brought about by the conjunction of the neo-patrimonialism and the domestic and multinational private interests, stimulated by global food demand—imposes a very oppressive power in the material world of rural Cambodians. As stated above, they fear the concessionaries because of intimidation and pressure tactics and they reacted without adequate knowledge and skills. LWD, through its intervention, attempts to fill this gap in the confidence and capacities of PPs in relation to possible future cases of land grabbing.

Finally, the economic land concessionaries have created jobs for citizens. This has reduced the turnout of PPs in the LWD programme, thereby seemingly undermining LWD’s efforts to build their confidence and capacities to deal with land grabbing.

8.3 Revisiting Transformative Learning

In this section, I will discuss the knowledge contribution of this study to TL theory. First of all, conceptually this study demonstrates that the TL framework can be complemented by the Freirean approach and Gramscian thought in order to better capture a multi-scalar phenomenon that encompasses not only personal transformation, which is traditionally the domain of TL, but also social change.

In Chapter four I problematised the unrealistic preconditions in which TL is likely to occur. Particularly in the Cambodian context, various preconditions required for TL are lacking, including limited democratic spaces (albeit the decentralisation reforms) and the resource-scarce conditions. As discussed, LWD has been trying to remove these socio-political and material-physical impediments by, for example, opening up the more democratic spaces and building the capacities of PPs towards self-reliance.

I also argued in Chapter four that TL's rather agential view of agency can be complemented by the critical realist moderate view of agency, in such a way as to unpack how the exercise of one's agency is constrained by social circumstances. TL hence occurs as reflexivity in relation to structures. In particular, PPs were faced with such generative powers of structural constraints, making the process of perspective transformation gradual.

Regarding the specific interventions of LWD, some instrumental 'learning by doing' has had a direct pertinence to TL for claiming rights. In particular, LWD staff's prompting PPs to speak out in meetings and trainings created a disorienting dilemma that triggered TL for enhanced confidence. In addition, PPs' practising rights itself reinforced their perspective transformation toward enhanced agency.

Related to practising rights is the finding that the increased understanding of human rights by PPs led to their TL for claiming rights. Existing TL research shows that TL in non-rights-based participatory approaches such as farmer field schools (FFSs) can bring about social engagement; for example, in the form of questioning local authorities. But the added value of RBA is that the explicit knowledge of their rights provides something that people can cling onto in exercising such rights. Hence understanding and practising one's rights are distinctive and essential attributes of rights-based TL.

Finally, as seen, the collective dimension of TL, such as communicative learning, emotional support, authentic and trusting relationships and social recognition

fostered PPs' TL in claiming rights. This dimension was particularly instrumental in their engagement with the powers of constraint generated by structures as well as compensating for the lack of preconditions for TL.

In summary, it does appear possible for TL to gradually take place for rural Cambodians, who struggle with the two nemeses as well as the socio-political and material-physical impediments to TL for enhanced agency, through rights-based empowerment. Yet, as seen, a great number of enabling factors need to be introduced and to be *worked out on the ground* in order to compensate for the lack of the various preconditions for TL, which has been theorised mostly in the more affluent and less oppressive contexts of the West, particularly that of North America. It is natural, but in a way ironic, that in order for such 'Rolls-Royce' TL to occur in Cambodia, a massive amount of resources need to flow from the West into Cambodia and staff of high calibre need to be employed to create the conditions conducive to TL, as evidenced in the well-funded and large-scale operation of LWD and its top-quality staff among the NGO industry in Cambodia. This poses a doubt as to how replicable the kind of TL and RBA which LWD facilitates is for other NGOs, particularly those with limited resources and that work in even less favourable political and policy contexts.

8.4 LWD and Its Practice: Critical View vs. Pragmatic View

As discussed in Chapter seven, LWD and the Cambodian government are complicit in diverting people's attention from land grabbing through SLCs. To delve further into the higher level structures, neoliberalism as global political and economic ideology—manifested as the World Bank's neoliberal intervention and private interests of domestic and international concessionaries, stimulated by the global food demand—works in a complicit manner with neo-patrimonialism and the authoritarian state. Thus, it can be interpreted that LWD complementarily facilitates neoliberalism on the ground as Petras (1999) analyses:

While the IMF-World Bank and MNCs [multi-national corporations] work the domestic elites at the top to pillage the economy, the NGOs engage in complementary activity at the bottom neutralising and fragmenting the burgeoning discontent resulting from the savaging of the economy. (p. 440, comments in brackets added).

LWD's depoliticised history and/or its operational principle of working with government appears to have made LWD aloof from or blind to the fulfilment of its role as the forefront of the war of position for "struggle for meta-political democracy" (Fraser, 2009, p. 27).

However, working with government is perhaps the only option that this NGO could choose given the oppressive political context. For example, Global Witness, an international human rights NGO that monitored common rights in the forestry sector and mobilised citizens' movements in Cambodia, provoked the irritation of the Cambodian government, and as a result, they were expelled from Cambodia back in 2002 (Hughes, 2007). In addition, for the last several years, the Cambodian government has been trying to legislate an NGO law to particularly tighten its control over human rights NGOs.

As discussed, LWD's moderate approach has been gradually bringing about further shifts on the structures through sensitising and capacitating people and local government. As shown particularly in Chapter four, the literature on RBA indicates the empirical evidence of how such moderate and non-confrontation approaches are the only workable option especially in relation to authoritarian governments of developing countries. From the above critical standpoint, such acts may be critiqued as the complicity with government. However, from the perspective of the strategic-relational approach (SRA), those acts are indeed structurally-oriented strategic calculation or the only pragmatic option in which those NGOs could survive and possibly bring about incremental changes on oppressive structures.

8.5 Implications for the RBA

LWD has contextualised RBA to fit it into the rural Cambodian context by working it out on the ground as well as utilising its existing community development and empowerment approach.

Working with government rather than being confrontational is one of the key operational principles of LWD's RBA. This approach has enabled LWD to play the role of the middle-ground RBA, enhancing the rights-based interactions between PPs and local government. Its close relationship with government also allowed LWD's direct involvement in rights issues in such forms as public forums and national-level networking. Resonating with this approach, LWD aims at the gradual realisation of

rights in accordance with the gradual evolution of local governance capacities by, for example, binding local government to offer what they can provide given their current resources and capacities. However, it should be noted that the well-funded and large-scale operation of LWD, which helped establish its credibility, coupled with the decentralisation reforms as a strategically-selective or favoured policy of the Cambodian government, has permitted LWD to operate in this way.

On the other hand, the depoliticised LWD did not problematise the neo-patrimonial generative mechanisms behind the seemingly benevolent policies of the decentralisation reforms and Social Land Concessions (SLCs). In particular, it did not conscientise PPs about deeper-level injustices hidden behind the democratic façade or passive revolution of the decentralisation process, thereby ending up promoting ‘thin’ social rights. Hence the principle of working with government is a double-edged sword and should not be considered as a formula to be applied uncritically and naively. In this regard, a critical political and social analytical lens that allows penetration into generative mechanisms, such as Gramsci’s concepts of consensual domination and passive revolution, may help as an initial situational assessment.

As another salient feature of LWD’s programme, its service-delivery approach (SDA) helped PPs establish their material-physical and economic base, through which they can venture into the business of claiming rights. In addition, if established well, such solid livelihood can help them resist the tactical acts of charity by economic land concessionaries in the form of employment opportunities.

Regarding LWD’s donors, the result-oriented and donor-driven nature of SDA appeared, to a certain extent, to undermine LWD’s process-oriented approach aligned with rights-based empowerment, as evidenced in the dependency attitude of some PPs. This is a difficult issue, as essentially ‘money talks’ in NGOs’ relationships with donors. There is no space to discuss this at length here, but as a general guideline, conscious and continuous efforts need to be made to educate both donors and workers in NGOs about the fact that the donor-driven nature does limit the impact of rights-based empowerment.

Nonetheless, LWD’s experience shows that SDA, beyond its expected material and economic betterment, can strategically contribute to rights-based empowerment. For example, the planning of physical projects equipped PPs with proposal writing skills, which is essential for claiming their rights to development from duty-bearers.

Moreover, as LWD implemented service-delivery activities, it constantly reminded PPs of rights and duties related to those activities, thereby helping them understand their rights in a more tangible manner. Furthermore, PRA methods were utilised to conscientise PPs about their rights and as the basis for rights-claiming; for example, disaster mapping, for requesting local government's response to disaster-affected areas.

One of the fundamental differences between traditional human rights NGOs—and perhaps even some rights-based NGOs—and LWD is the constant presence of LWD's front-line workers who actually stayed in their assigned villages, which made the repeated process of empowerment possible. As seen, the power of such relationships is the cornerstone of LWD's confidence and capacity development efforts.

As opposed to didactic ways of teaching, it was seen that LWD utilised dialogical processes in its rights-based trainings. Moreover, as opposed to the knowledge transfer of abstract rights concepts, LWD helped PPs to connect their realities with pertinent rights, hence enabling them to gradually move towards an understanding of existing rights instruments.

Land grabbing issues are difficult for citizens to deal with and are unlikely to lead to immediate positive results. For such issues, LWD's strategy is that by conscientising citizens through a better grasp of land rights and equipping them with adequate knowledge and skills, particularly in forming groups and alliances, they might be well prepared for future land grabbing cases and hence be able to bring about the subtle transformation of oppressive structures associated with land grabbing through their brave and tactical interactions with government and concessionaries. In addition, LWD's efforts to open up democratic spaces prior to land grabbing is likely to alleviate the socio-political impediments to citizens' exercise of agency in claiming their rights to land.

8.6 Further Questions

As a result of undertaking this research, I feel there remain a few areas of uncertainty that are worth exploring through further research. First of all, I feel that it is beneficial as a contribution towards TL theory to conduct further intensive research on how peer-support through CBOs actually works (a) as an outcome between the collective nature of the Cambodian society as part of the Asian culture and its shattered social relationships chiefly due to conflicts; (b) in compensating for the lack of

preconditions for TL; and (c) in relation to the hierarchical nature of the Cambodian society. Secondly, it is valuable to document the dynamics of how the various practical methods to deal with land grabbing, which were introduced by LWD, work in the actual context of land grabbing currently in process, in order to generate lessons for NGOs in the light of prevalent land grabbing not only in Cambodia but in many other developing countries. Thirdly, as a practical implication of RBA, I hope that a study is conducted to identify how small NGOs or indigenous social movements in Cambodia can be agents for rights-based TL in the light of their likely small amount of resources and power to influence government, unlike LWD. Finally and as a broader implication for RBA, given that neither the confrontational model of traditional human rights NGOs, which basically ‘names and shames’ government and thus tends to provoke antagonistic responses, nor the non-confrontational ‘softly-softly’ model of LWD, which does not penetrate into the neo-patrimonial structures, work, what then are practical alternatives that would impact efficaciously on such socially-embedded and politically-motivated structures or generative mechanisms without being too confrontational with government? The Gramscian social and political analysis is the starting point as mentioned, but how should NGOs go about influencing this core of many of the injustices in Cambodia?

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Appendices

Appendix 1: List of Interviewees Cited in the Thesis

Name	Gender	Function/Role	Date
Bourey So	Male	LWD's CEF in the second research site	10 September
Bunnath Prum	Male	District chief in the first research site	9 July 2012
Champey Nak	Female	LWD's CEF in the second research site	10 September
Chantrea	Female	FFS in the first research site	22 March 2012
Chatou Norn	Female	VDC/FFS in the second research site	30 August 2012
Chean Huy	Female	Women's group in the second research site	11 September
Chenda Meng	Female	VDC/Rice bank in the second research site	19 September
Inn Sin	Male	LWD's GALO in the first research site	6 April 2012
Jorani Tan 1	Female	VDC/Village bank/FFS in the first research	23 March 2012
Jorani Tan 2	Female	VDC/Village bank/FFS in the first research	18 July 2012
Jorani Tan 3	Female	VDC/Village bank/FFS in the first research	6 April 2012
Jorani Tan 4	Female	VDC/Village bank/FFS in the first research	10 July 2012
Kolab Pen	Female	Women's group in the second research site	29 August 2012
Kunthea Oung	Female	FFS in the second research site	12 September
Ky Bun	Male	LWD's senior staff	11 September
Maly Van	Female	LWD's GALO in the second research site	3 September 2012
Mealea Chim	Female	FFS in the second research site	18 August 2012
Munny Sock 1	Male	LWD's senior staff	19 September
Munny Sock 2	Male	LWD's senior staff	14 March 2012
Munny Sock 3	Male	LWD's senior staff	14 September
Nhean Hy	Female	Commune chief in the first research site	10 July 2012
Phhoung Hout	Female	Youth group in the first research site	17 July 2012
Phhoung Hout	Female	Youth group in the first research site	10 July 2012
Pick Oung	Female	LWD's CEO in the second research site	3 September 2012
Polo Pak	Male	Commune chief in the first research site	10 July 2012
Rottanak Kim	Male	LWD's CEO in the first research site	16 July 2012
Samnag	Female	Village Health Volunteer in the first research	4 April 2012
Simach Vichea	Male	Non-project participant in the first research	11 July 2012
Song Heng	Male	LWD's senior staff	11 July 2012
Sophat Um 1	Male	LWD's senior staff	12 September
Sophat Um 2	Male	LWD's senior staff	18 September
Sopheat Pan	Female	LWD's CEF in the first research site	16 July 2012
Sophol Inn 1	Female	FFS in the first research site	30 March 2012
Sophol Inn 2	Female	FFS in the first research site	17 July 2012
Sovann Vy	Male	LWD's senior staff	17 September
Thea Lee	Female	LWD's CEO in the first research site	5 April 2012
Theary Yeng	Female	LWD's CEO in the second research site	13 September
Tinekor Meas	Male	LWD's senior staff	17 September
Veata Loun	Female	VDC in the first research site	4 April 2012
Virak Chhay 1	Male	LWD's senior staff	22 February 2012
Vothol Mao	Male	Commune chief in the second research site	12 September

All the interviewees are anonymised through pseudonyms.

Appendix 2: Focus Group Interview Schedule for Project Participants

Day 1

On LWD's intervention:

1. *What was your village like before?*
2. *How has your village changed since you started working with LWD?*
3. *How has LWD been helpful in your village?*

On mental distance between project participants and duty-bearers (Venn diagram exercise):

Reminder Notes to Myself:

- Show the example diagram
- Make sure that they discuss before they cut circles
- Make sure that they all agree on all the diagrams before proceeding to a discussion

Initial Questions:

- 4.1. *How did you view the Commune Council (CC), the District Office (DO) and the companies in 2005?*
- 4.2. *Then how did you view them in 2008/2009?*
- 4.3. *And how did you view them in 2012?*

Explanation:

(By showing the example diagram) This diagram is just an example. Sizes indicate statuses. For example, if you feel equal to them, your village should be the same size as them. If you feel that you are lower than them, you should be smaller. Distance indicates mental distance or feeling. For example, if you feel afraid of them, the distance should be wider. If you think you can approach them easily, the distance should be closer.

Probing Questions (after participants completed the exercise):

- 5.1. *Why did you draw them in those sizes?*
- 5.2. *Why did you locate them in those places?*
- 6.1. *How would you describe your relationship with them?*
- 6.2. *Did you or do you fear them?*
- 6.3. *Why did you change your view on the CC, the DO and the companies?*

Day 2

On LWD's intervention to influence the agency of project participants for fulfilling their rights:

- 1.1. *What have the rights-related problems been within villagers' families and in your village so far?*
- 1.2. (After each response) *Do other people see this as a rights-related problem in your village?*

(By going through each problem identified above)

2.1. *How have you grappled with each problem?*

2.2. *Could you share your experience?*

(Questions below where necessary)

- *What things helped you to grapple with it?*
- *What things inhibited you from grappling with it?*
- *Why weren't you able to grapple with it?*

(If they do not bring up problems related to rights to development)

You have rights to development. For example, you have rights to education. You have rights to health services. You have rights to clean water. You have rights to enough food. You have rights to better infrastructure such as roads.

3.1. *How have you achieved your rights to these things?*

3.2. *Could you share your experience?* (After each response)

3.2. *Do other people have similar experiences?* (Let them discuss among themselves first if they did not come up with ideas).

(Questions below where necessary)

- *What things helped you to achieve your rights to X?*
- *What things inhibited you from achieving your rights to Y?*
- *Why weren't you able to achieve your right to Y?*

4. (If they do not come up with any achievement of rights through the CC and the DO)
How have you achieved your rights to these things (development) through the CC and the DO?

Appendix 3: Individual Interview Schedule for Project Participants

On LWD's intervention:

- 1.1. How has your life changed since you started working with LWD?
- 1.2. How has LWD been helpful for you?
- 1.3. Could you describe the most important lesson you learned from LWD?

On mental distance between project participants and duty-bearers:

- 2.1. How did you view the village leader, the Commune Council (CC), the District Office (DO), and the plantation company before (like in 2005)?
- 2.2. Why did you have such views?
- 3.1. How, if at all, have your views on the village leader, the CC, the DO and the company changed?
- 3.2. Why did you change your views on the village leader, the CC, the DO and the company?
- 4.1. How would you describe your relationship with them?
- 4.2. Did or do you fear them?

On LWD's intervention to influence the agency of project participants for fulfilling their rights – 1 (If not applicable, skip)

- 5.1. What rights-problem have you been faced with? What was it like?
- 5.2. What did you think then?
- 6.1. How have you grappled with it?
- 6.2. Could you share your experience?
- 7.1. What things helped you to grapple with it?
- 7.2. How did they help you to do so?
- 7.3. How did LWD help you to do so?
- 8.1. What things inhibited you from grappling with it?
- 8.2. Why weren't you able to grapple with it?
- 8.3. How did they inhibit you from grappling with it?

You also have rights to development. You have rights to education. You have rights to health services. You have rights to enough food. You have rights to better infrastructure such as roads.

- 9.1. How have you achieved your rights to development?
- 9.2. Could you share your experience?
- 9.3. What things helped you to achieve your rights to X?
- 9.4. What things inhibited you from achieving your right to Y?
- 9.5. Why weren't you able to achieve your right to Y?
- 9.6. How about your rights to land?

On LWD's intervention to influence the agency of project participants for fulfilling their rights – 2:

(Only if I have time and a participant seems able to answer)

- 10.1. What do you think is the most effective way to achieve your rights?
- 10.2. How did you learn them?
- 10.3. How has your practice of your rights changed since LWD started working with you?

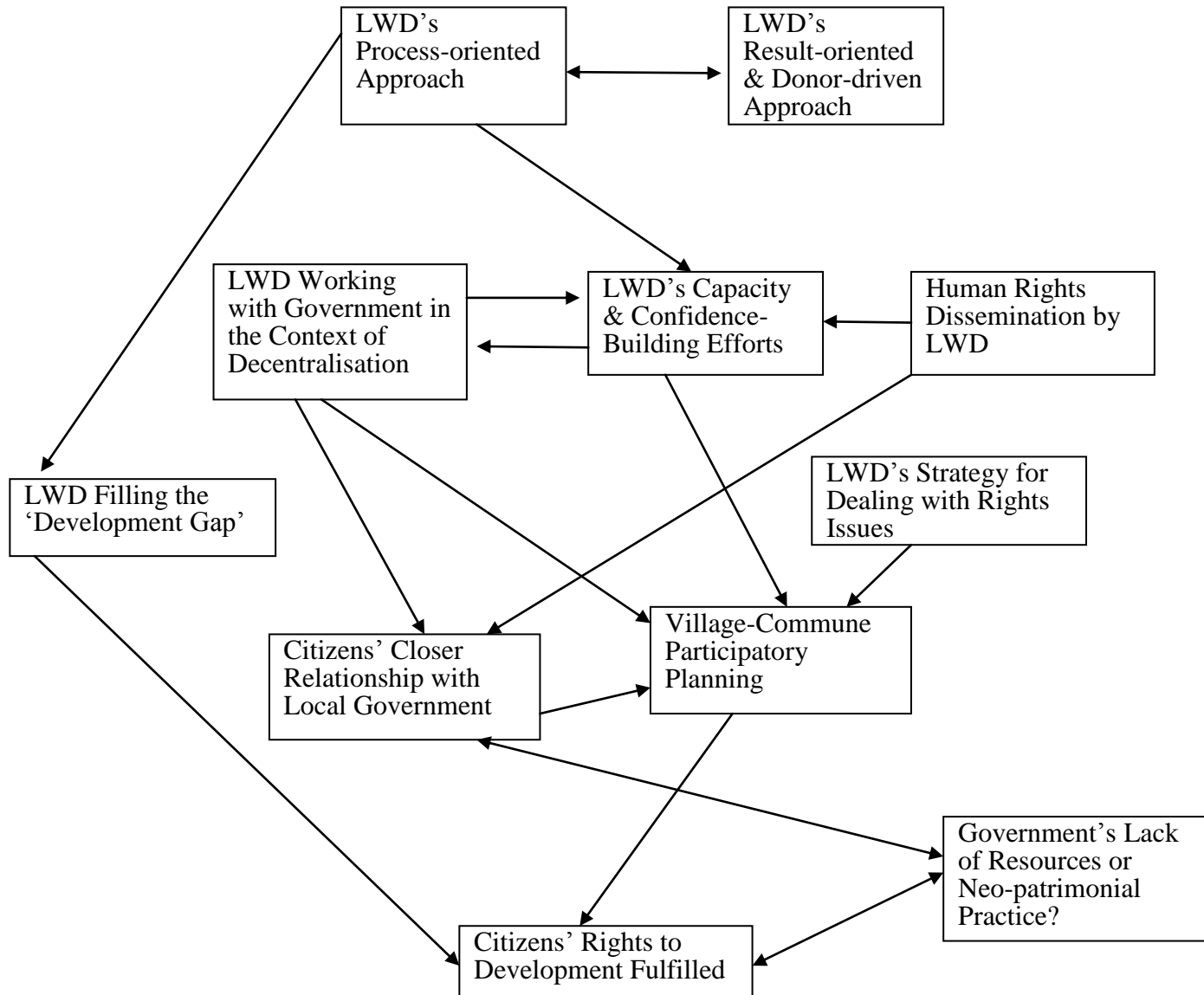
Appendix 4: Life Story Interview Schedule for Perspective Transformation

You told me the following:

It is not difficult to propose development activities to the Commune Council (CC).

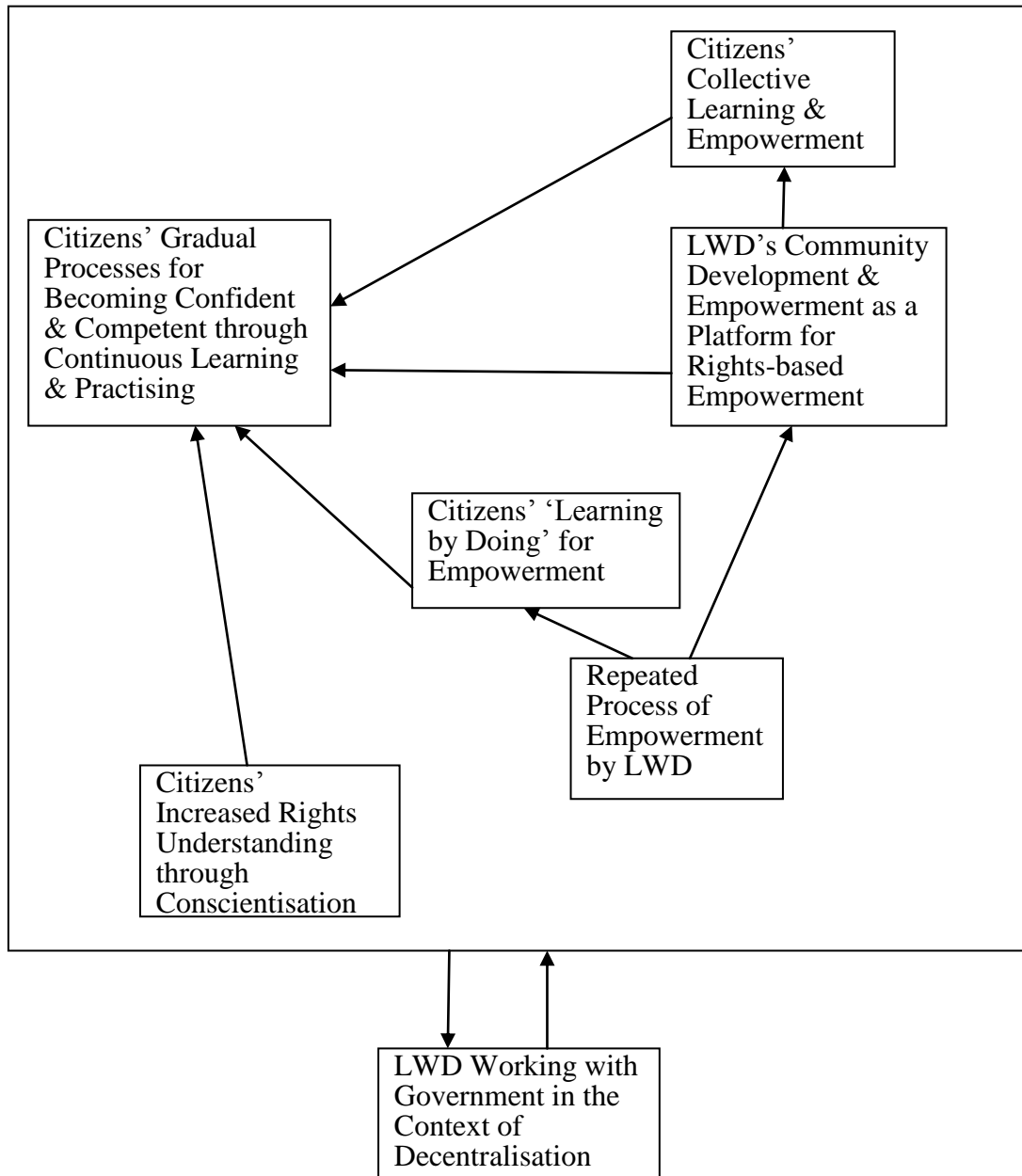
1. How would you describe your relationship with the CC before?
2. How have your idea and practice of proposing development activities to the CC changed?
3. Could you describe your experience?
(Questions below where necessary)
 - What was your experience like? / Tell me what it was like to go through your experience?
 - What made you change your ideas? Are there any things that contributed to those changes? How did it/they influence you? Why did it/they influence you?
 - Why have you changed your ideas?
 - What was going on in your mind?
 - What was going on in your feelings?
 - What did that mean to you?
 - What did that make you feel?
 - What happened next?
4. Is there anything that you might not have thought before that occurred to you during this interview?

Appendix 5: Category Diagram for Rights to Development and Decentralisation



Appendix 6: Category Diagram for Building the Confidence and Capacities of Citizens

Confidence and Capacity Building



Appendix 7: Category Diagram for Dealing with Land Grabbing

